

# TOP Santé

LOVE YOUR HEALTHY

NEW BEAUTY ESSENCES

Younger-looking skin is  
just one step away

DANCE YOUR  
WAY TO FITNESS

Toned legs ✓  
Firmer arms ✓  
Better posture ✓

RADIATE  
CONFIDENCE

Supercharge your  
self-image this weekend

RELEASE  
STRESS **NOW!**

Why happy tears keep you calm  
and balance your hormones

Indulge  
and relax  
with simple  
DIY spa  
rituals

6 EASY TESTS  
TO MOT  
YOUR EYES

Time to  
Celebrate  
*you!*

NOURISHING COMFORT FOODS  
Good for your soul – kind to your waistline





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## MEET OUR EXPERTS



Thyroid expert  
**Dr Izabella Wentz**  
answers hormone  
questions, on p100.



Nutrition expert  
**Henrietta Norton**  
talks about healthy  
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Relationship expert  
**Sara Davison**  
advises on  
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busy life, on p96.



Digital editions  
available on iPad  
& Android.

### LEARN THE LINGO

Santé means  
'health' in French.  
So here's to your  
Top Health!

# Give thanks

It's so easy to focus on the outside world – where you live, the car you drive, the job you do, the people in your life – as these things preoccupy most of your waking moments and demand immediate attention. And while it's certainly a fantastic habit to be grateful for, and appreciative of, all that you have externally, this month we want to encourage you to turn your attention within. So, why not stop for a moment to celebrate every achievement, large or small, you've accomplished over the years? I bet there are many!

Lots of women, myself included, can fall prey to focusing on things they haven't yet accomplished, or what they think they could have done better. Perhaps it's part of a collective feeling of not being enough somehow – but we can choose to change.

At this turning point in the year, I urge you to find some quiet time for yourself and list all the amazing things you've done so far in life, along with how you've grown, and become a better person for it. Part of living a naturally healthy life is to appreciate yourself, including the amazing job your body does, balance activity with rest, and, hopefully, become your own cheerleader. Much love...

*Katy x* @RealKatyLouise

## BE A PART OF TOP SANTÉ

Calling all readers! What do you want to see more of in *Top Santé*? Your views matter. Take part in our new reader panel and help us develop your favourite health title to better suit you. It only takes a few minutes.  
Email [readerpanel@topsante.co.uk](mailto:readerpanel@topsante.co.uk) - Thank you!

## THE TOP SANTÉ MANIFESTO

At *Top Santé* we believe every woman has the ability to maximise her health and beauty at any age and regardless of her health history. With a balanced diet, effective exercise and a positive mindset, you can stay younger for longer, inside and out. We'll bring you the latest information regarding

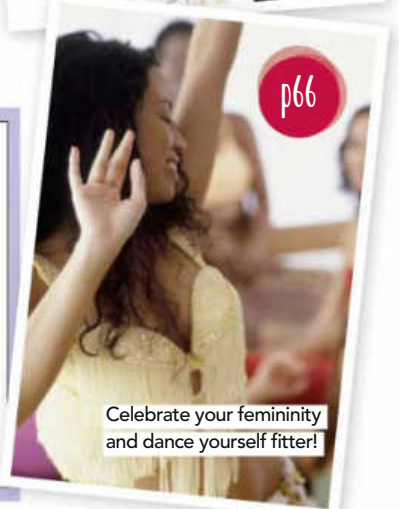
wellbeing, fitness, food and beauty, empowering you to make informed choices now and for your future health. What's gone before can't be undone or redone, so leave it in the past and focus on what you can change today. We're here to help you on that path to better health, one small step at a time.



Learn how even the  
modest among us can  
benefit from self-praise.



Sparkle with  
confidence at  
New Year parties.



Celebrate your femininity  
and dance yourself fitter!



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**PLUS** get 65 per cent off a Top Santé subscription! Turn to page 40.



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**FREE!**

A two-night spa break for two people at the fantastic Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa, worth £800. Turn to p94 to enter.



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# 5AM? I DECIDE WHEN THE NIGHT ENDS, NOT MY PERIOD.



**New\* Always Ultra. Up to 100% leak protection.**

Stay out till sunrise with new Always Ultra. Its super absorbent core has liquid locking gel, and gel can't leak.

Remember, great stories don't happen when you stay in. Also available in Liners.

clean • dry • fresh  
**always**



\*Improved core with more liquid locking gel.





# YOUR HEALTHY January

We bring you the latest  
wellbeing news to help  
you get off to the  
best start  
in 2016.

## FEEL THE WARMTH

It's no surprise that drinking a cup of warming liquid warms your cockles on a chilly day, but according to Indian Ayurvedic medicine, drinking warm water can do so much more than just heat you through. Regularly drinking it, especially in the morning, can help aid digestion and reduce metabolic waste in your immune system. It can also help alleviate pain, as the heat from the warm water has a calming and soothing effect on your abdominal muscles, relieving cramps and spasms.

Finally, it can even keep you looking younger for longer! Accumulated toxins in your body can lead to ageing, but warm water helps flush them out better than cold water, while also repairing cells that increase the elasticity of your skin\* – we'll drink to that!



70%...

...of the average person's intake of fluoride comes from the water in a cup of tea!

## HEALTH: THEN & NOW

We look at how healthcare advice has advanced over decades and even centuries.

This month, heroin to treat a cough!

**1890s** In the 19th Century, Bayer (the developers of Aspirin) produced a new drug, heroin – a highly addictive and dangerous narcotic substance. Shockingly, among its many advertised uses was 'cough suppression.'

**2016** These days, there are lots of ways to treat a cough, including natural remedies. One such remedy uses flaxseed, honey and lemon. Boil 2 tbsp of flaxseed in a cup of water until the water becomes thick. Strain, then add 3 tbsp each of honey and lemon juice and take a spoonful as needed.

● With thanks to Dr Chidi Ngwaba.



*'The way you treat yourself sets the standards for others.'*

Unknown

## Mindfulness goes mainstream

With benefits such as lower stress levels, higher productivity and feeling happier, it's no surprise that mindfulness is becoming so popular. A group of MPs and a number of hospital trusts are calling for more investment into mindfulness therapy to make it widely available in schools, hospitals and workplaces across the country. The benefits have been widely proven, so make this the year you 'live in the moment'.



This exercise can be done anywhere at any time, standing up or sitting down. Start by breathing in and out slowly, then, on one of your in-breaths, hold it for a count of six seconds. Breathe out slowly, letting your breath flow effortlessly back into the atmosphere. Naturally, your mind will try to wander, but simply acknowledge your thoughts, then discard them from your mind and return to monitoring your breath for a calmer, clearer head. Do this for 5 minutes, whenever you feel overloaded.

● Exercise from [pocketmindfulness.com](http://pocketmindfulness.com).

## On your bike

Dust off the Lycra, don your helmet, and join the cycling revolution. The sport's popularity in the UK has reached a record high and is now the third most popular in England. So there's never been a better time to switch to two wheels, even in the winter.

From the daily commute, to leisurely cycles at the weekend and even taking part in competitive events, an estimated 3.1 million people ride a bicycle each month\*. With benefits like improved cardiovascular fitness with less strain on the knees, ankles and hips than running, it's no wonder so many people are taking to the saddle.





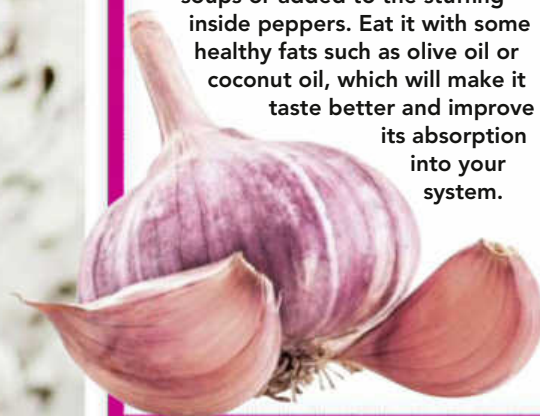


## EMBRACE GARLIC BREATH

Tuck into those garlic olives at the New Year buffet because experts are singing the praises of the pungent little bulb for its cardiovascular health and immune-boosting properties. One clove contains 5mg of calcium, 12mg of potassium and more than 100 sulfuric compounds, powerful enough to wipe out bacteria and infection and keep those sniffles at bay this winter. However, experts have found its powerful properties can be compromised when heated, so it's best eaten raw for maximum benefit.



**To enjoy garlic raw without too much of a kick, try it whipped up with white beans, made into houmous with chickpeas, grated on salads and soups or added to the stuffing inside peppers. Eat it with some healthy fats such as olive oil or coconut oil, which will make it taste better and improve its absorption into your system.**

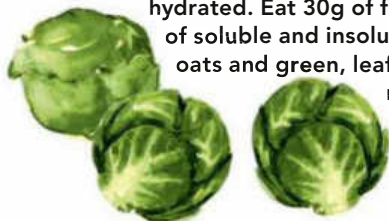


## New detection for bowel cancer

A revolutionary new device proven to increase the detection of pre-cancerous polyps, as part of bowel cancer screening, has been introduced to the UK. The Endocuff Vision, used at The London Clinic, has been shown to increase adenoma detection rates by more than 24 per cent when carrying out colonoscopies. The device allows for hard-to-reach areas that can hide problems to be assessed.



**For optimum bowel health, drink at least 3-4 pints of water per day to keep yourself hydrated. Eat 30g of fibre every day – a mix of soluble and insoluble fibre is ideal, from oats and green, leafy veg to beans and rice. Visit [cancerresearchuk.org](http://cancerresearchuk.org) for information.**



## Conceal and heal

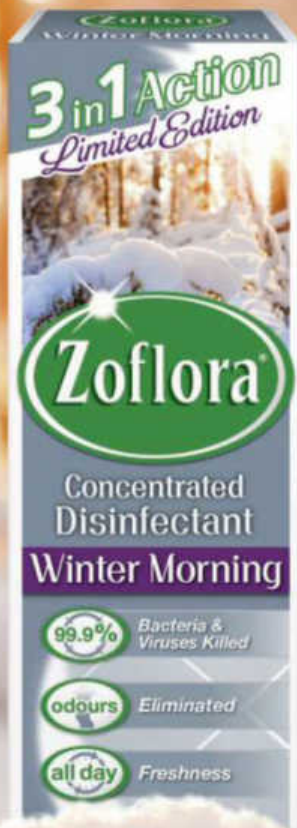
Enjoy an even, healthy complexion free from winter blemishes with bareMinerals' Bareskin Complete Coverage Serum Concealer. With antioxidant lilac plant stem cells to firm your skin and humectants to keep it hydrated, the ultra-lightweight multitasking concealer not only covers but cares for your skin, too, leaving it softer and healthier. £22, [bareminerals.co.uk](http://bareminerals.co.uk).





# What will your Winter Scent sation be?

The crisp, *Frosty* aroma of



Or

The warm, *Spicy* scent of



a cool, fresh fragrance combining  
mint and sweet vanilla with a  
touch of seasonal spices

a seasonal fragrance  
combining warming cinnamon,  
cloves and vanilla

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Disinfectant 120ml or 250ml



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For a hygienic, *fragrant* home:

- ☒ Floors ☒ Baths ☒ Tiles ☒ Taps
- ☒ Worktops ☒ Drains ☒ Dishcloths
- ☒ Toilets ☒ Potties ☒ Hard surface pet areas

[zoflora.co.uk](http://zoflora.co.uk)



Use disinfectants safely. Always read the label and product information before use. Do not allow pets to lick or walk on wet, treated surfaces. Keep off until dry.

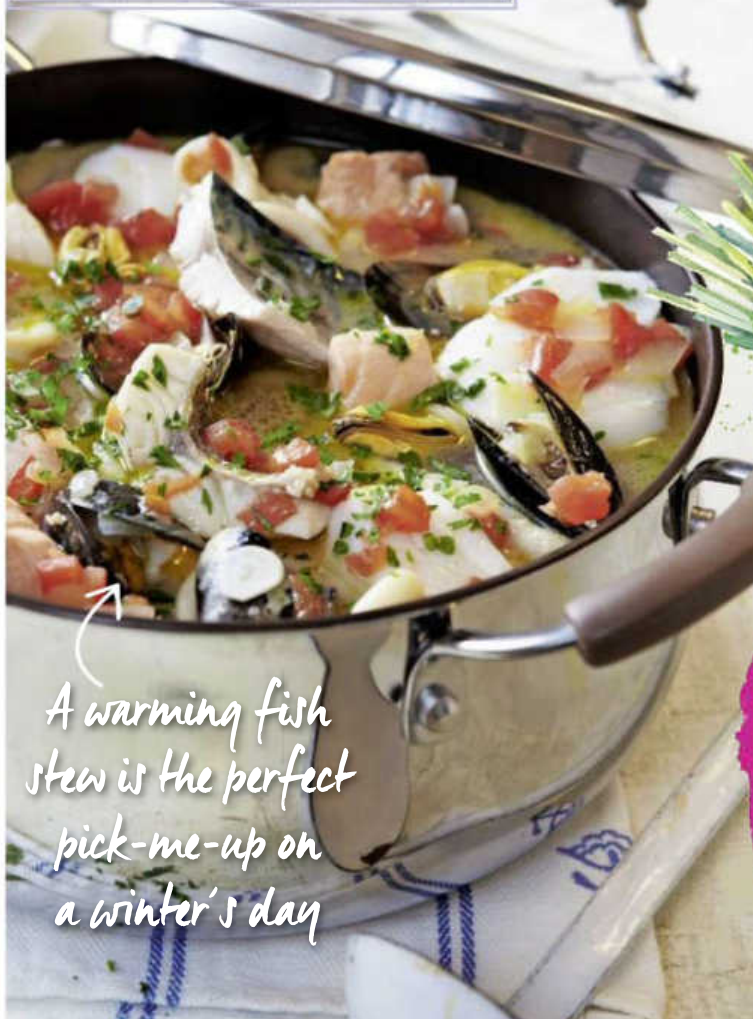


## Fishing for happiness

That fish supper you cook up on a Friday might be the key to a happier, healthier mind. According to a report published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, eating plenty of fish may help curb the risk of depression. This is particularly important during the winter months when depression and conditions such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) are at their peak due to the cold, dark, wet weather.

Fish is rich in multiple beneficial nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids, which may alter the way certain neurotransmitters – the brain's chemical messengers – work. Low levels of neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin are thought to contribute to depression, because they are linked to your ability to think, organise, remember and feel pleasure.

Researchers assessed studies over 13 years and found that people eating the most fish had a 17 per cent reduction in the risk of depression compared to those eating the least amount of fish.



*A warming fish stew is the perfect pick-me-up on a winter's day*

## KAT'S NAP CORNER

In the latest in our sleep series, features editor and self-professed bad sleeper Kat, tests sleep-inducing remedies to find what, if anything, really works.



**What is it?** Deep Sleep Pillow Spray, £16, [thisworks.com](http://thisworks.com).

**How does it promote sleep?**

Infused with essential oils of lavender, vetivert and wild chamomile, this pillow mist is designed to calm body and mind, helping you drift into a natural, sound sleep. Simply spray on your



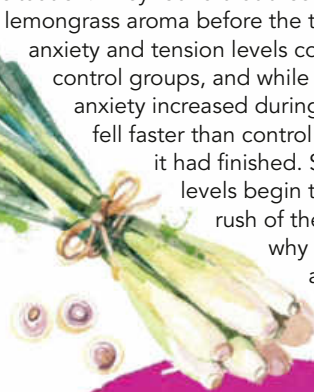
pillow before bed and enjoy the relaxing scent. **Kat's verdict** I really like this product. It smells lovely, is easy to use and really worked! I drifted off much more easily than usual after using the spray, and woke feeling calmer and refreshed, as if I'd had a more sound slumber.

**Overall rating:**



## De-stress with lemongrass

The scent of lemongrass could help you stay calm and relaxed this winter. In a recent study at Brazil's Federal University of Sergipe, scientists measured psychological and physical elements, such as feelings of tension and heart rate of over 40 participants in a stressful test situation. They found that those who inhaled the lemongrass aroma before the test had reduced anxiety and tension levels compared to the control groups, and while their levels of anxiety increased during the test, they fell faster than control groups after it had finished. So, as stress levels begin to rise during the rush of the festive period, why not indulge in a calming cup of lemongrass tea?



## Relax and unwind with new chillout albums

This month we're helping you celebrate yourself and, as part of that, taking time out to relax and rejuvenate (see p17 for our DIY spa guide). Music can help you set the mood and relax even further. We love the latest Personal Spa Collection from New World Music, with instrumental renditions of well-known classics by artists such as Abba, Madonna and Coldplay. For 20 per cent off the CDs, visit [newworldmusic.com](http://newworldmusic.com), or call 01986 891600, and quote 'TS16'.



# SING *your* PRAISES

The New Year is often a time to make changes, but it's also the perfect moment to reflect on all you've already achieved in life and celebrate who you are.

**I**MAGINE STARTING 2016 feeling calm and content. Taking time to pause and reflect is often all it takes to realise just how much you've achieved, which can give you a sense of satisfaction. Stopping for a while and bringing an element of mindfulness to your life in this way – stilling your thoughts and focusing only on the now – can help you to work those mental self-appreciation muscles. You can also take this a step further and delve deeper into your feelings of self-worth. The New Year is traditionally a time of planning positive life changes – whether it's to take up running, learn to cook, find a more fulfilling job or just to get back in touch with old friends. But instead of, or as well as, these more outwardly and forward-focused pastimes, why not look within and list all the reasons to celebrate who you are now and what you've overcome? After all, if you only ever strive to improve and do better, you may end up missing the good things and finding joy in the here and now. There's no doubt that change is an important part of personal growth, but what's just as important is appreciating how far you've come and what is already working well in your

**Celebrate  
what is  
already  
working well  
in your life  
and find joy  
in the here  
and now.**

world, whether it's large or small.

But if the mere thought of giving yourself a mental pat on the back makes you cringe, you're not alone. Most of us are simply not used to singing our own praises. 'Talking about what you're good at is not a very British thing to do – it's much more culturally acceptable to be self-deprecating,' says clinical psychologist Dr Jessamy Hibberd, co-author of *This Book Will Make You Confident* (Quercus). 'Women in particular often bond by running themselves down, making jokes about their faults and failings.'

It's not surprising self-praise doesn't come naturally if, like so many of us, you've grown up being told not to 'show off' or warned that 'nobody likes a big-head'.

As a society, we've wised up that children thrive on praise and we no longer worry that acknowledging their achievements will 'spoil' them. You're probably also great at recognising your friends' and colleagues' personal triumphs, whether big or small. Self-praise, on the other hand, is a very different story. According to a University of Manchester study, we still think of it as bragging. But celebrating your own progress is just as important as celebrating other people's,









says Dr Hibberd. 'Some people have a very strong sense of self, but for many of us there is a mismatch between how we see ourselves and how the outside world sees us based on what we've achieved.' So 20 years after you flunked maths at school, you still see yourself as 'useless with numbers', even though you now efficiently organise the household finances. Giving yourself a pat on the back the next time you do your tax return, or switch the mortgage to a better deal, can help update your self-image and boost your self-esteem in the process.

### Prime your brain for positivity

'Marking your milestones and achievements, whether privately or publicly, can also help to counteract your brain's natural negativity bias,' says psychologist Dr Emma Seppälä, author of *The Happiness Track* (Piatkus). As a species, we evolved with 'better safe than sorry' brains that are naturally tuned into negative events, as these are more likely to be a threat to us. A side effect is that we can easily overlook or discount the positive things in life. 'We live our lives so focused on the negative that we often fail to notice, let alone enjoy, what we have achieved,' says Dr Seppälä. 'This tendency to give more weight to the negative may have helped our species survive by highlighting potential dangers. However, in this day and age, our negativity bias, both as it relates to the environment and to our self-judgements, can erode our wellbeing.' Research has found that even though we have three times more positive experiences than negative ones, what sticks in our minds are the negative events. 'Ever noticed that if your boss says nine positive things and one negative thing at your yearly appraisal, you can't stop thinking about that one criticism?' says Dr Seppälä. Regularly taking the time to think in detail about what's going right for us is a way of counteracting this bias, rewiring the brain so that it not only tunes into positive experiences, it lays them down as memories. As Oprah Winfrey said: 'The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate'.

**Giving yourself a pat on the back for a job well done can help boost your self-esteem.**



### *Believe in you!*

Don't berate yourself too much or be your own worst enemy, as others will pick up on this lack of confidence and may interpret it as weakness, believing they can treat you with less respect. Be as positive about yourself as you can, even if at times you don't feel it. You'll eventually start believing your new thoughts, and come across as more assured, attracting more positive interactions.

Taking stock of what you've achieved on a regular basis can counteract another evolutionary quirk known as 'hedonic adaptation'. The human brain is designed to adapt to change as quickly as possible, to give us the best possible chance of survival in a volatile environment. But the downside is that the positive emotions you feel when you've reached a goal are short-lived. It's why shortly after you crossed the finish line of that half marathon, you started to think about doing another one. Or when you slimmed down to a size 14, you started thinking how great

it would be to be size 12. Research shows that even lottery winners return to their pre-win levels of happiness within a year.

'We're also natural hunters,' says Dr Seppälä. 'The joy of the chase and the excitement of a potential or imagined reward is called anticipatory joy. It triggers a hit of a neurotransmitter, dopamine, that helps create feelings of pleasure. Anticipatory joy helped us survive (through the pursuit of food sources) and ensured our reproduction as a species (through the pursuit of sexual partners). Now it drives us to get more things done, piling up achievements and accomplishments for some possible future success.'

Taking the time to pause and celebrate what you've achieved can help





you step off this treadmill, and focus on enjoying the here and now rather than always thinking, 'what's next?'

'When you're focused on being happy in the future, you miss out on the possibility of being happy now,' says Dr Seppälä. 'One of the first things I noticed when I joined Stanford University as a postgraduate student was how permanently anxious the other students were. Everyone was constantly knocking out one achievement after another. Before they had finished one task, their minds were already onto the next thing they could accomplish in the name of productivity and success. As a consequence, they were unable to be present and celebrate their current accomplishments or appreciate what brought them happiness.'

### Celebrate the little things

Deciding it's a good thing to celebrate your achievements is one thing, but how do you know what's worth making a song and dance about? 'Look for the effort,' says Dr Seppälä. 'Don't think you can only celebrate the big things, or things that have gone 100 per cent to plan,' she says. 'We all mess up at times and make mistakes, as we're only human. Rather than focusing on the end result, think about the times you put in a lot of effort, or you had good intentions.' So if you were determined to be more patient and less snappy with your mum this year and you managed it 75 per cent of the time, it's an accomplishment worth marking. Or if your goal was to be more active, think about the times you *did* make it to the

gym rather than the times you didn't. And, remember all achievements are relative, so if completing that 5k race was a big deal for you, celebrate it, even if you have a friend who clocks up marathons or your other half is a triathlete.

Paradoxical as it may sound, being happy with how far you've come is the perfect foundation for change. 'Being in touch with all you have achieved is very grounding, giving you a stronger sense of self and what's important to you,' says Dr Seppälä, 'and that's the perfect starting point for setting meaningful goals, ones that will consolidate your happiness.' So have a personal achievement party asap, and you'll be on the right track for meaningful success this year.

# Self-praise for modest people

Not used to blowing your own trumpet? Try these simple exercises to put you in touch with your achievements.

## Do an achievement timeline

Take a blank sheet of paper, turn it so it's landscape, then draw a horizontal line across the centre. Put a 0 on the far left-hand side and your current age on the far right. Divide up the line into four-yearly intervals (i.e. 4, 8, 12, 16, 20 etc.). Then, above the line, fill in the big life events that relate to that age (e.g. learned to swim, joined the Brownies, got a dog, moved house, passed driving test, lived abroad, bought first home, got married, had first child etc.). Below the line, add as many smaller, more personal achievements and accomplishments as you can remember (e.g. ended unhappy relationship, started a book group, raised £2,000 for charity etc.). It's an instant visual of how far you've come.

## Be your own coach

Developing a more compassionate inner dialogue can help you recognise your achievements, even when it feels like there's not a lot to celebrate. 'It's about learning to say, "this went well, but next time I'd do this differently..." instead of "well, I made a total mess of that",', says Dr Hibberd. As a bonus, research shows that self-compassion – treating yourself as kindly as you would a friend – builds self-esteem.

## Keep an achievement journal

Write down everything you achieve for a week, whether it's, 'I finally got to the bottom of the laundry basket', or, 'I made time to listen to my husband's worries about work' or, 'I made a great Thai curry for my friends'. 'Doing this for as little as seven days can create a lasting shift in the way you think, so you're more tuned in to your small achievements,' says Dr Hibberd.

## Start a 'good things' jar

Every time you get a compliment or some positive feedback at work, however small, scribble it down on a piece of paper and put it in a jar. Then,

next time you need a reminder of what you're good at, simply reach into the jar and a pull out a mental pat on the back!

## Use gratitude

It's well known that gratitude exercises, such as thinking of three things in life for which you feel grateful before you go to sleep, boosts mental wellbeing. It can also be a good way of highlighting your achievements and keeping them at the front of your mind if you add the question, 'how have I contributed towards those things I appreciate?'

## Savour the good times

'When you feel pleasure, close your eyes and be 100 per cent present with it,' says Dr Seppälä. 'Whether it is emotional, such as love, or sensual – food, touch or sound – savour the sensation or experience completely.' It's a way of embedding positive memories and staying in touch with what's going well.

## Create your own celebration ritual

You may not have a crowd of people to applaud every time you manage to perfectly parallel park or finally get the photocopier working at the office (more's the pity). But there's nothing to stop you creating an imaginary applauding audience, or finding another way to mentally 'high-five' yourself, like saying 'outstanding work, you superstar, even if just in your head and not out loud.' Creating your own private celebration ritual ensures that mini-moments of pride don't get lost among the general events of the day.

## Share your good news

When something good happens, don't keep it to yourself. Talking about your achievements helps embed them as memories, boosting your self-image. But if you worry about coming across as bragging, emphasise what you've learned from the experience and how other people have helped you achieve it. 📢





## My Greek Style Yogurt

I **LOVE** making my Organic Greek Style Natural Yogurt.

The gorgeous **ORGANIC MILK** I source locally makes this recipe so special. It gives it a lovely mild taste, yet **LUSCIOUSLY THICK** texture - **DELICIOUS** spooned over some fruit and granola.

*Rachel*

Add a swirl in a pasta sauce

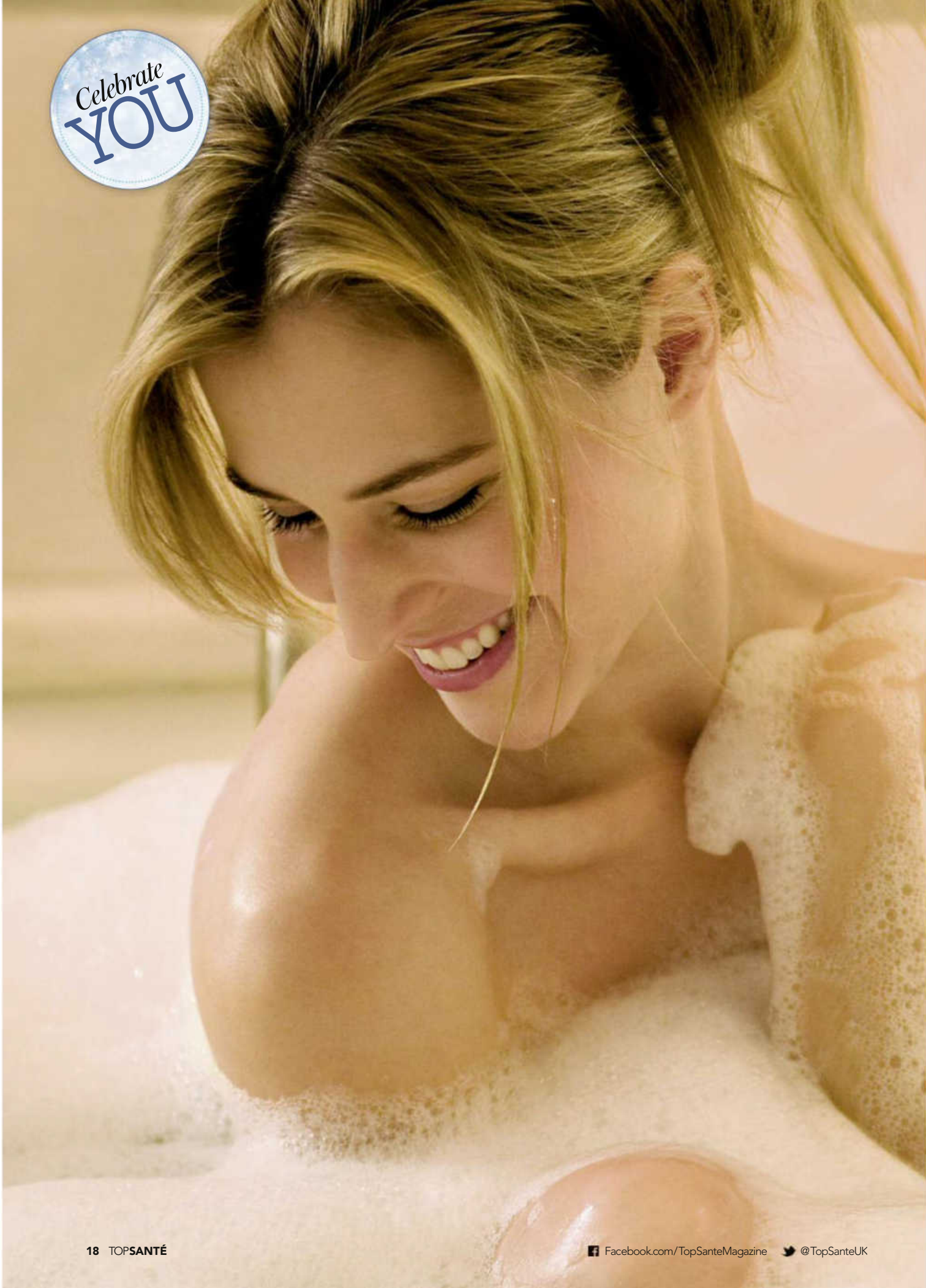


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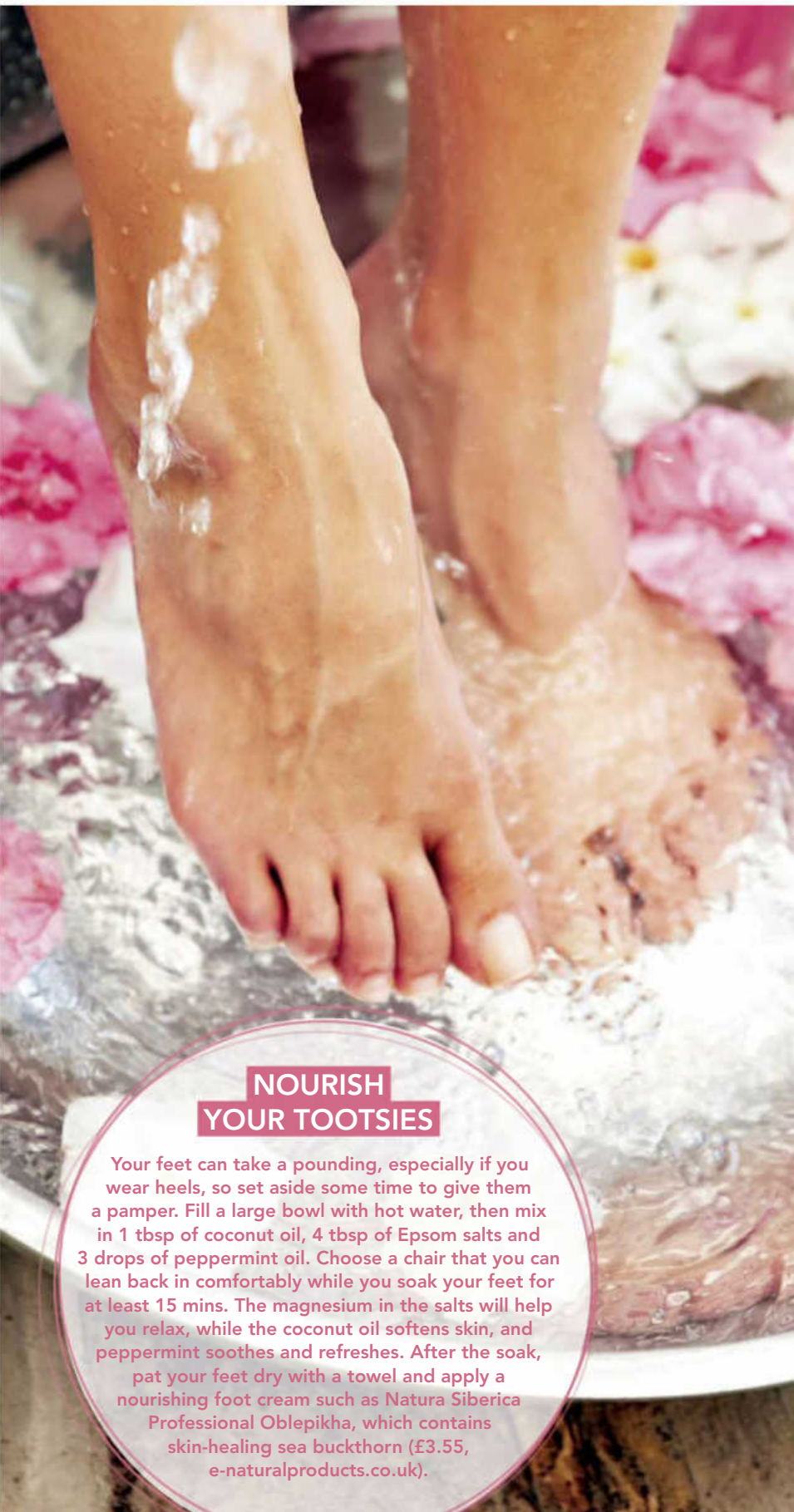




# TREAT yourself

Short days and long nights lend themselves to a more relaxed pace of life – perfect for soothing mind and body in the comfort of your own mini spa.

WITH FEWER THAN eight hours of daylight on most January days, it's no wonder you can often feel like hibernating. But instead of bemoaning the weather, why not make the most of this quiet time to be a bit more introspective and give yourself some pampering? You needn't venture to a faraway spa, as you can easily recreate the smells, sounds and sensations of a soul-soothing sanctuary without stepping outside your front door. So, turn off your phone, put on your fluffiest dressing gown and comfiest slippers, light a few candles and let the relaxation commence...



### NOURISH YOUR TOOTSIES

Your feet can take a pounding, especially if you wear heels, so set aside some time to give them a pamper. Fill a large bowl with hot water, then mix in 1 tbsp of coconut oil, 4 tbsp of Epsom salts and 3 drops of peppermint oil. Choose a chair that you can lean back in comfortably while you soak your feet for at least 15 mins. The magnesium in the salts will help you relax, while the coconut oil softens skin, and peppermint soothes and refreshes. After the soak, pat your feet dry with a towel and apply a nourishing foot cream such as Natura Siberica Professional Oblepikha, which contains skin-healing sea buckthorn (£3.55, [e-naturalproducts.co.uk](http://e-naturalproducts.co.uk)).

### Create cosiness

There's real science behind why you should create a space to pamper yourself. A relaxing environment quells stress hormones such as cortisol, which, when elevated, can weaken your immune system. So, fill a corner of your home with everything you need to feel truly relaxed during your pamper session. Gather up a soft beanbag and/or plenty of cushions in silk, velvet or faux fur to lounge on. Light scented candles or try a coloured light bulb – green is said to stimulate the soothing oxytocin hormone. Lastly, put on spa-style music. Try *Harp Spa: Music for Meditation & Wellness & Peace*, £8, [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk).

### Stimulate your brain

If you find head massages truly blissful, it's likely you experience Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) – the term for the neurological response of tingles and soothing sensations through your head and neck after certain stimuli. While it's tricky to get this response when you touch your own head, the Dzine massager has vibrating prongs that do the trick when it's run over your scalp (£7.79, [thegiftoasis.com](http://thegiftoasis.com)).

### Recharge with yin yoga

A popular form of restorative yoga, yin releases your mind and body through passive poses that are held for anything up to ten minutes. The aim is to promote greater relaxation throughout your body, as well as increase flexibility. For a simple starter pose, try the butterfly. Sitting on some padding, bring your knees up to your chest then let your knees flop out to the side, bringing the soles of your feet together. Your ankles should be at least a foot away from your hips, with your hands holding on to them. Bend forward, relaxing your spine so your head drops towards your feet. Inhale and exhale, both to a count of four. With each breath, let your head come down a little more, without forcing it. With practice you may find you can rest it on your feet. Try to hold for three minutes or more for the full restorative benefits.

**Pamper your  
feet with a  
magnesium salt  
bath to relax  
and unwind.**

WORDS: KATHERINE WATT. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, CORBIS.





## FRESHEN WITH A FACIAL

Certain nutritional powerhouses aren't just great for your diet – they make revitalising face treatments too. If your skin feels stressed from winter weather, try this superfood home facial: mash up 1 avocado with 1 tbsp each of oats and kefir or natural yoghurt. Spread it on thick, then relax for 15 mins while it does its magic. Avocado is full of vitamin A, aka retinol, which helps renew skin that's been dried out by things like central heating. Yoghurt or kefir helps skin repel germs by balancing its microbiome, and oats contain saponins, which are compounds that act as natural cleansing agents.

### Relax in meditation

If you want to shoo away germs without lifting a finger, spend some time meditating this winter. A US study showed that people who meditated reduced the effects of respiratory infections by up to 50 per cent. It's suggested the practice helps your body calm its fight or flight response, so you are better able to ward off germs. Set a timer, or music track, for 10 minutes, then, in your cosy corner or upright on a chair if that's comfier, sit with your hands resting on your thighs, palms upward. Breathe in and out, each for a count of four, focusing on your breath, acknowledging but not exploring thoughts that enter your mind.

### Soothe your body

Often, you don't realise how tense your body has become until you stop and take a pause from your everyday routine. Soothing your muscles can start with a hot, healing bath. As the water is running, add three drops each of clove and clary sage oil (£2.99 and £5.49, [enaissance.co.uk](http://enaissance.co.uk)), which promote muscle relaxation to help you release tension and stress. For an in-bath massage, try the waterproof Phat QR Body & Cellulite Massager (£18, [sweetsationtherapy.co.uk](http://sweetsationtherapy.co.uk)). Place it under your legs, back or shoulders, where its rolling spheres will help improve your circulation and loosen up any tight or knotted muscles.

### Use aromatherapy

Aromatherapy has been around for more than 6,000 years – first used in Ancient Chinese temples. And, as your home is currently your temple, you can follow suit with this blend. In a clean plastic bottle, mix 10 drops of mandarin, 3 drops each of sandalwood and marjoram, and 25 drops of grapeseed oil. Put some into an oil burner, then dab the rest onto your temples, inside wrists, sides of your neck and backs of knees. The blend will help you feel balanced and rejuvenated.



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# The big SIGHT TEST

Start the new year by giving one of your most important senses an MOT. Our quick and easy tests will help ensure your eyes are healthy.

**L**OOK AROUND YOU for a moment. Take in all the different shapes, colours and movements that make up the world. Sight is the pinnacle of your sensory perception – the function that sets off a fascinating interplay between your eyes and brain. It helps you decide what your favourite colour is, absorb your surroundings on a winter walk and take visual snapshots of your loved ones to store as memories.

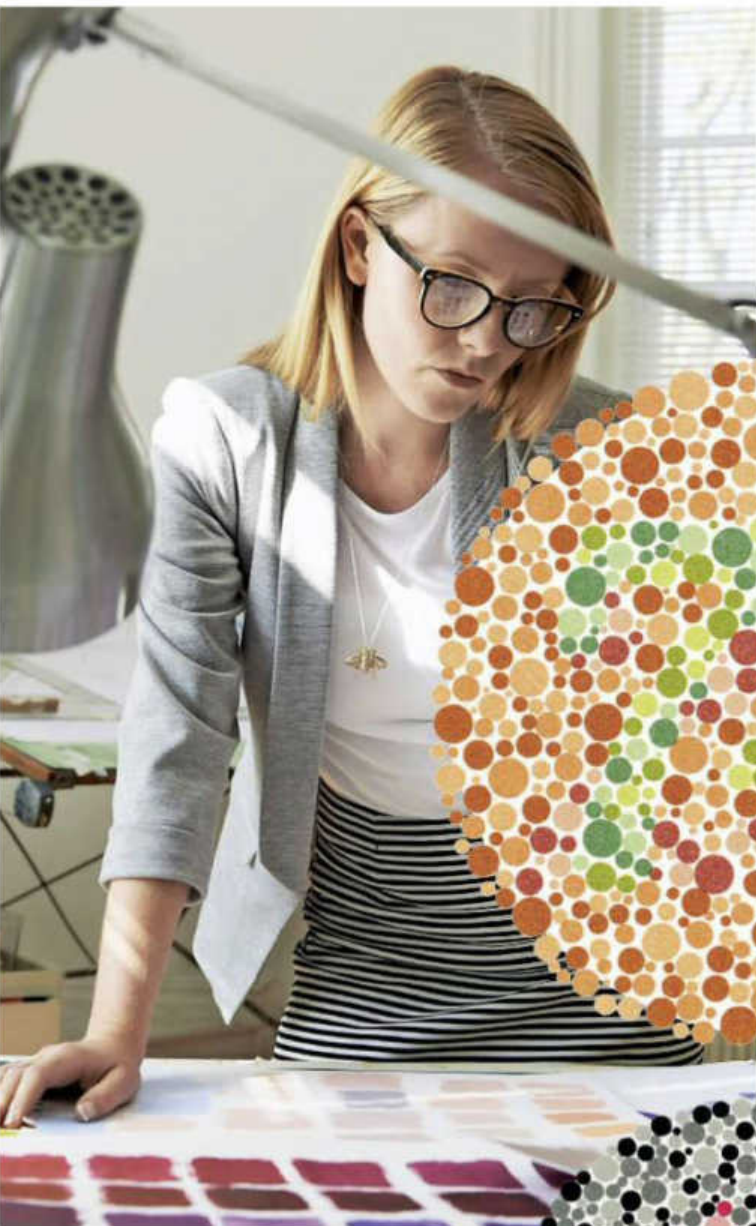
A healthy lifestyle goes a long way toward keeping your eyesight working well. People who exercise for at least 30 minutes a day are 70 per cent less likely to develop eye conditions such as macular degeneration, and people who don't smoke also greatly minimise their risk. If you spend a long time looking at

a TV or computer screen, ensure you go by the 20/20/20 rule: focus on an object around 20 feet away from the screen for 20 seconds, every 20 minutes. This helps you avoid eye strain.

A balanced diet plays a crucial role too. Omega-3s, found in oily fish such as wild salmon and mackerel, help to prevent your eyes drying, which causes unnecessary strain. Any brightly coloured veg are a must for eye health too. These include carrots, as well as tomatoes, strawberries, pumpkins, and leafy greens such as spinach, kale and Brussels sprouts. They provide a combination of vitamins C and A, which help with the protection and regeneration of cells in your eyes, plus plant-based pigments lutein and zeaxanthin, which help to block harmful light from reaching your retinas.

## How vision works

Your iris is like a shutter to your 'biological camera', controlling the amount of light that enters your eye, which is then filtered by the cornea and the lens. This allows the images you're looking at to form on your retina. The retina, with its 125 million light-sensitive cells, acts as a filter to send visual information via the optic nerve to your brain. When all of the different parts of your eye are working properly in unison, you should have good visual acuity (distinguishing details and shapes of objects), good focus and good binocular vision (how the eyes work together to overlap fields of view). If you notice any changes to your vision including blurriness or pain, visit an optician. In the meantime, try our sight tests over the page to see how well you see.



## 1a ISHIHARA TEST FOR COLOUR BLINDNESS

In 1917, Dr Ishihara of the University of Tokyo designed 38 plates to detect deficits in people's colour vision. Within the dotted patterns are different coloured dots that form shapes or numbers. There are four types of plate: Transformation, where people with a colour vision defect see a different figure from those with normal colour vision; Vanishing, where only those with normal colour vision recognise the figure; Hidden digit, which determines a person's colour vision recognition; and Diagnostic, which is intended to determine the type of colour vision defect and its severity.

Most cases of colour blindness are congenital, with around five per cent of people in the UK born with the condition. However, certain medications, accidents, advancing old age or chronic illnesses such as liver disease, Alzheimer's and diabetes can cause acquired colour blindness, which affects up to three per cent of adults. If you have any concerns, consult your GP or optician.

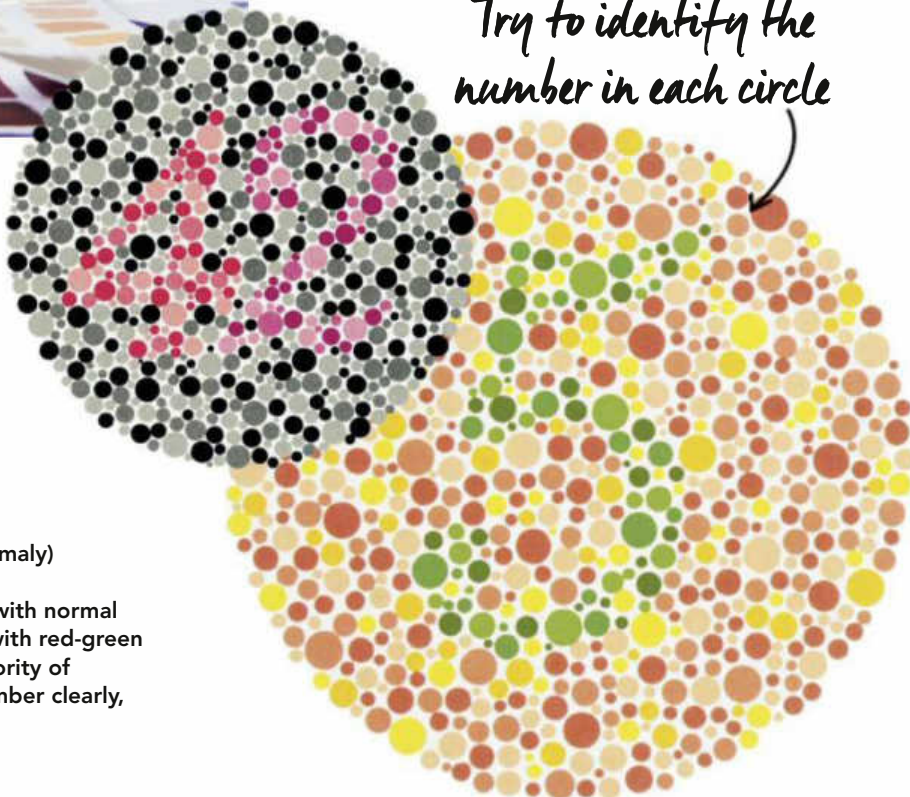
● If you see a 21 here, or you can't decipher anything, you could have a level of colour blindness. If you see a 74, your vision is normal.

## 1b THE RED-GREEN COLOUR TEST

● Look with both eyes at the circles to the right. What do you see? In the top circle, people with equal colour vision see the number 42. People with red colour blindness (protanopia) will see a 2, and those with just mild red colour blindness (protanomaly) will also faintly see a 4. If it's the other way round and you see just a 4, it signals green colour blindness (deuteranopia). Mild green colour-blind people (deuteranomaly) may also see a faint 2.

On the larger bottom circle, those with normal colour vision see a number 5. Those with red-green colour blindness see a 2, and the majority of colour-blind people don't see this number clearly, or see no number at all.

Try to identify the number in each circle

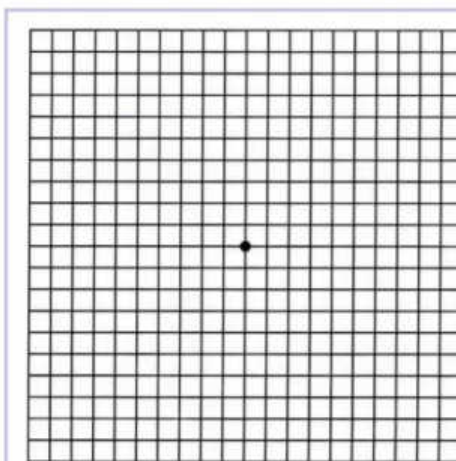




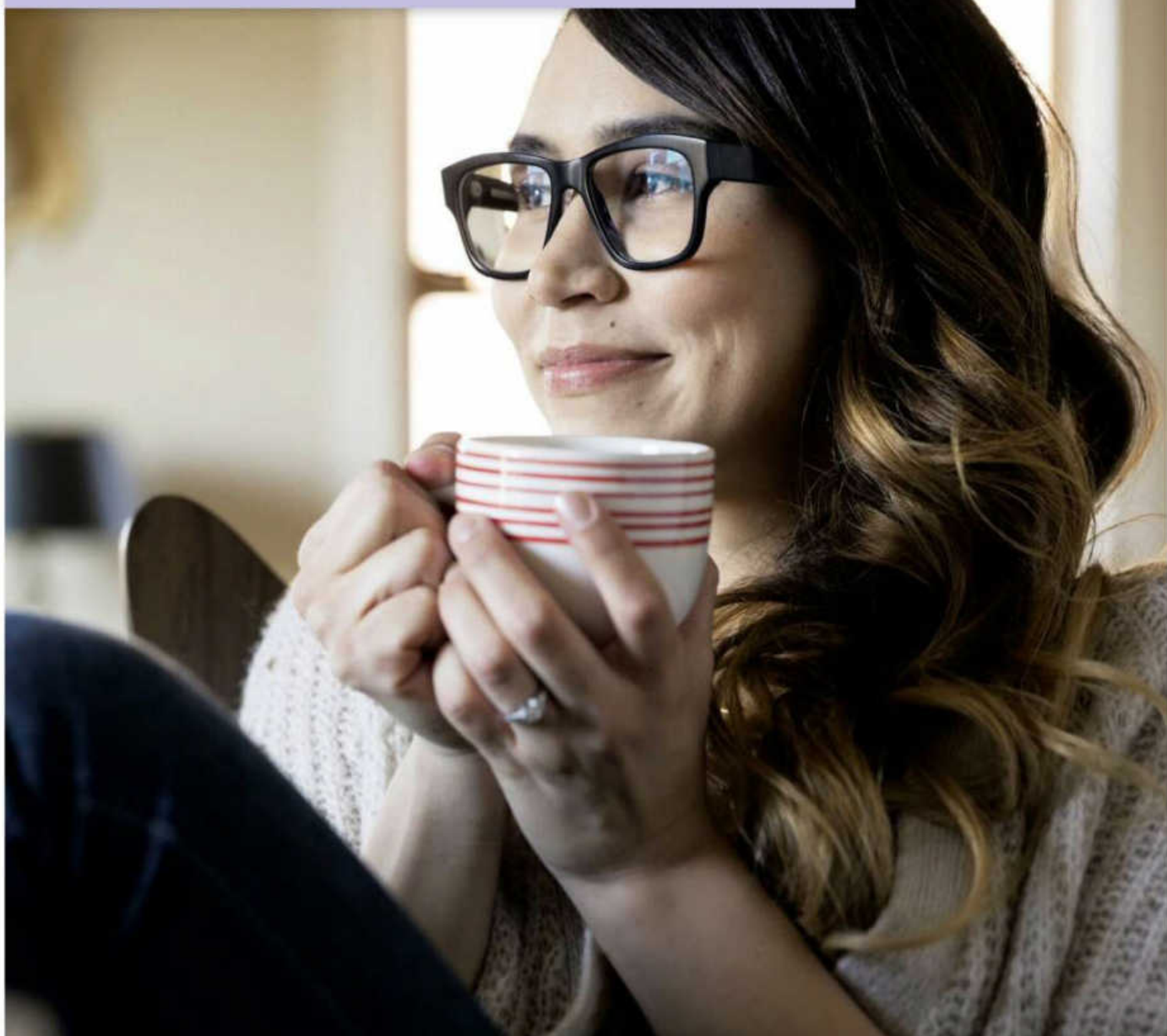
## 2 AMSLER GRID TEST

This is most commonly used to check how well your visual field is working. Problems such as glaucoma or macular degeneration, which affect your retina or optic nerve, are often tested with this method.

● **Cover one eye and focus the other on the dot, at normal reading distance. While looking at this dot, you should still be aware of the lines of the grid. Notice if any are distorted or broken, or if areas are blurred. Repeat with the other eye. If you see all the lines straight without waves or curves, your vision is fine. If not, visit an optician.**



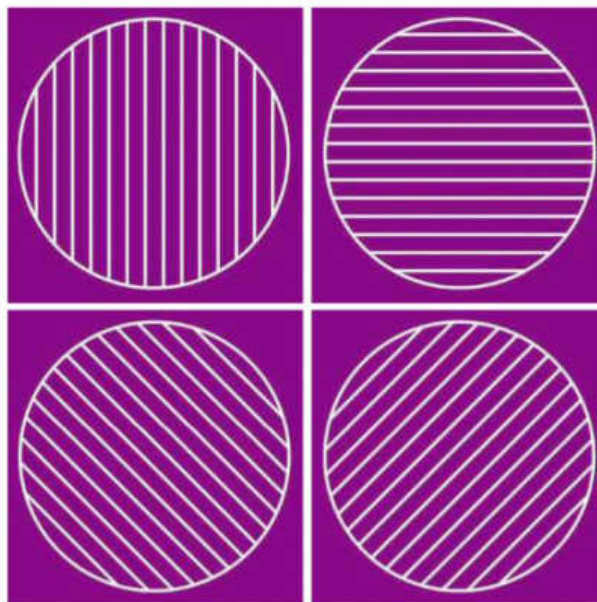
*Look at the dot with each eye separately to check your visual field*



### 3 THE ASTIGMATISM TEST

An irregular corneal curvature is commonly found in people with short- or far-sightedness. It means they can't see objects as clearly either up close, or far away.

● Look at all the circles one by one, testing your right and left eyes individually, then both together. If you wear glasses, keep those on for the test. Do you see clear lines in all the circles? If the lines are blurred in one or more directions, it could indicate irregularities in your vision, which should be checked out by an optician in case you need glasses or a different prescription.



6 8 5

2 4 9 7

4 2 0 8 3

6 9 7 5 0 2

5 7 3 8 4 2 6

7 3 6 8 5 3 0 9

8 9 6 3 5 7 4 2

5 6 8 3 0 4 9 2 5

2 7 9 6 8 3 0 5 1

7 4 1 2 5 6 3 9 0

### 4 THE EYE CHART TEST

Far-sightedness (hyperopia) occurs when the light that enters your eye is focused behind your retina, instead of directly on it. The most common causes are the cornea not being curved enough, or when the lens sits further back in the eye than normal. It's often congenital but can develop with age as the cornea hardens (presbyopia), and could be a precursor to glaucoma. When you're far-sighted, it's harder to recognise things up close.

● Put this page on a shelf at eye level, around 3m away. Close one eye and look at the chart on the left line by line. You should be able to read the top four lines quite clearly. If anything above the sixth line down is blurry, it could indicate a problem.

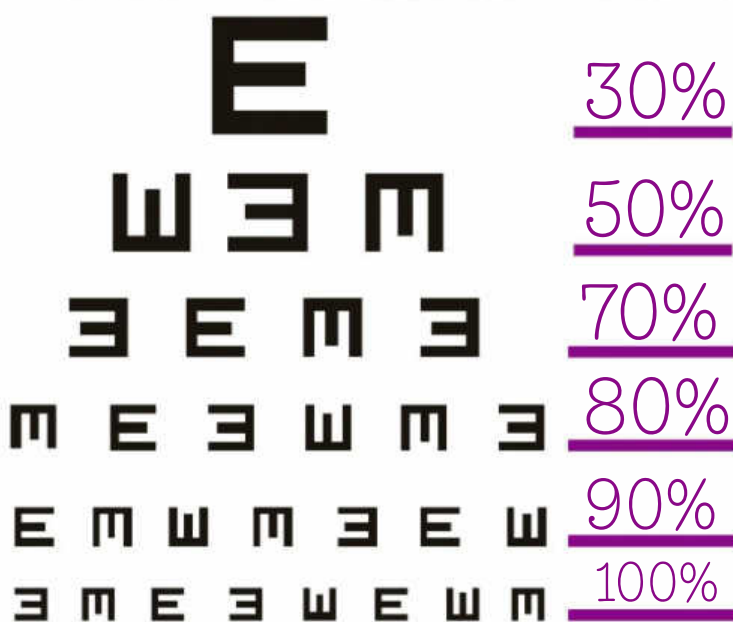
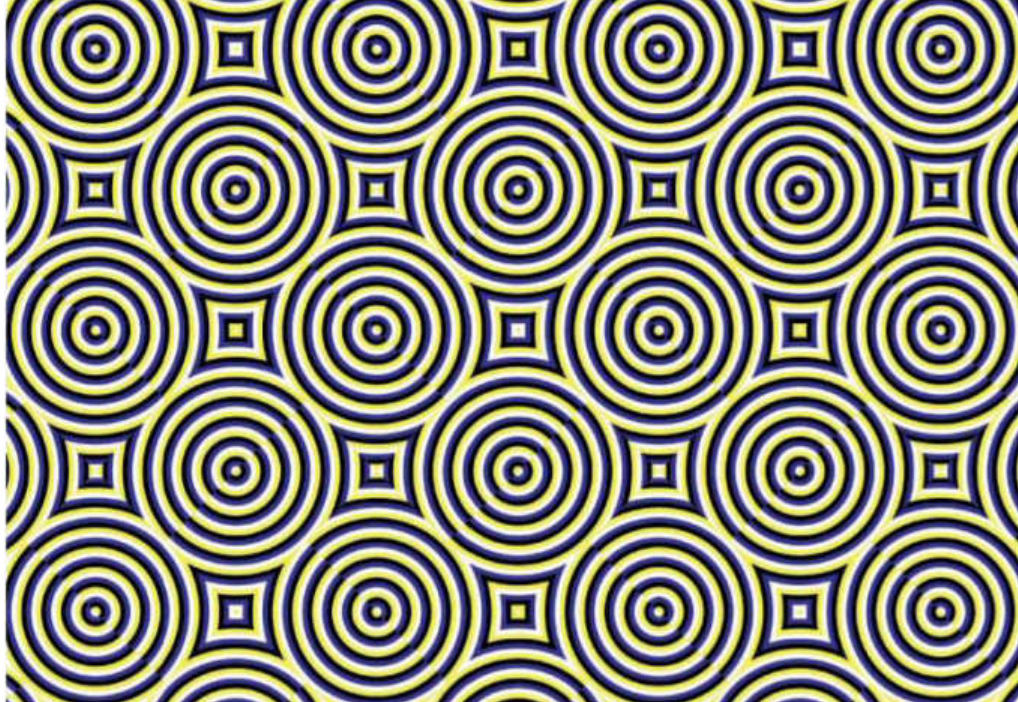




## 5 THE OPTICAL ILLUSION

Good spatial vision enables you to tell the distance of different objects in front of and behind each other – an important skill when driving or playing ball games. When both eyes are working effectively together, your depth and spatial perception is clearer.

● **Focus on the centre of one of the circles for a few moments. If the other circles in the image appear to move, especially if you move the paper toward and away from you, it shows that you have good spatial vision. If not, you may need glasses to correct your vision.**



## 6 THE TUMBLING LETTER E CHART

When you're short-sighted (myopic), it's harder to see things further away, but things close up are fine. It's caused when the eyeball is too long or the cornea is too curved, meaning light rays focus at a point in front of the retina rather than on its surface. It can come on later in life due to too much time indoors in decreased light, or too much close-up work such as reading or on the computer.

● **Place this page at eye level on something three meters away, such as a shelf. Test each eye in turn to see whether you can distinguish the orientations of the different Es in each line. If the line can no longer be read at the 100 per cent line, you may be short-sighted.**



## New treatment is ray of light

The leading cause of blindness in adults is an age-related condition called macular degeneration (MD), but there's an exciting new non-drug treatment on the horizon. Trials of a non-invasive light-based treatment will begin in Europe later this year. The device shines light emitting diodes (LEDs) into the eyes over a series of weeks, which helps damaged cells regenerate.

# Tears of JOY

Letting the tears flow when watching a sad film or celebrating at a wedding, can provide a vital emotional release. So let rip, says Dr Nicola Davies.

**S**ETTling DOWN FOR a cosy evening, I spotted that one of my all-time favourite weepies – *It's a Wonderful Life* – was scheduled on the telly.

When that familiar music kicked in, my stomach fluttered, eyes prickled, and the lump in my throat started to swell. But instead of forcing it down, I let the tears flow, and felt all the better for it.

I'm not alone either. In a study where filmgoers were asked to rate their emotions after watching the tear-jerker *Life is Beautiful*, half of participants reported a long-term elevation in their mood as opposed to the other half, who weren't moved by the film and didn't feel boosted afterwards\*.

But not all people find it easy to cry. A recent survey by mental health charity Mind found that one in six people thought that showing emotions was a sign of weakness. The charity's chief executive Paul Farmer, disagrees: 'Many of us lead busy, stressful lives and sometimes it can feel as if things are spiralling out of control. Although it might seem tempting to put on a brave face, we want to spread the word that it really is OK to cry.'

## I cry, therefore I am

'Crying is a universal human phenomenon. Everyone cries,' says professor Gail Kinman, a chartered psychologist who has studied crying

in the workplace. 'However, how it is perceived varies cross-culturally. Some cultures are much more accepting of it.' For example, while we in the West tend to be quite reserved with our tears even at funerals, in countries such as Uganda it's normal to hear people wailing.

It's not just our culture that determines our crying – gender plays a part too. 'In the Western world, women cry 2-4 times more often than men,' says Gail. In Arabic cultures and Southern European nations where men are expected to show their feelings, it is more acceptable for them to let the tears flow.

'Men tend to cry when they are emotionally overcome, rather than when they are distressed. It is socially acceptable for a man to cry at sporting achievements or when a baby is born,' says Gail. 'On the other hand, women tend to cry through frustration and anger. It's a reflex reaction.'

Many of us can attest to this – feeling the tears well up because something just won't go right, or after being on the receiving end of some spiteful words.

One reason why crying is generally seen as more acceptable in women is the hormonal link. Prolactin, the milk

hormone, is excreted in emotional tears. Its main role is to stimulate milk production, but it builds up whenever your oestrogen fluctuates during pregnancy, menstruation or menopause. This means crying comes more easily to women as our bodies' hormones attempt to get rid of the build-up and to rebalance themselves. Testosterone, on the other hand, which men have more of, inhibits prolactin.

**After a good cry you feel a significant release of stress symptoms, such as muscle tension and anxiety.**

## What happens when you cry

Located in your eye socket, underneath the outer edge of your eyebrow, are your lacrimal glands. These are responsible for releasing fluid to protect, clean and nourish the surface of your eyes. This fluid comes in two types:

reflex tears, which protect your eyes from irritants, such as when chopping onions, and emotional tears, which help you release overwhelming emotions.

There is also a third type of tear: basal tears. These keep your eyes moist and infection free. They originate from different glands, located under your eyelids, and with each blink they lay a little film of moisture over your eyeballs. These are the tears that on a windy day, will end up streaming down your face!

ILLUSTRATIONS: LARA COSTAFREDA.  
\*SOURCE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.





Each type of tear is made up of different 'ingredients', according to Dr William Frey of the Ramsey Medical Center in Minneapolis, USA. Reflex tears are 98 per cent water and have a similar composition to salt water.

Emotional tears contain antibodies, oils and enzymes, such as lysozyme which is super-efficient in dealing with bacteria. As well as hormones, emotional tears also contain leucine enkephalin, a neurotransmitter that naturally acts as a painkiller during times of stress.

### Celebratory tears

Crying often gets a bad rap for representing negative emotions, but

there are a multitude of happy times that make people reach for the tissues. For example, around 50 per cent of women cry at seeing a romantic proposal, and 73 per cent tear up at a wedding. And there are other happy events – finding your lost cat, having a house offer go through, seeing someone win on a TV talent show – that can cause that familiar lump in the throat and misty eyes. It all stems back to the fact that emotional tears are triggered by feeling overwhelmed in some way. But, whether you are ecstatic or relieved rather than angry or upset isn't registered in your hypothalamus. This is the area that sets off physical reactions such as when to run, when to

eat and, in this case, when to cry. Your hypothalamus – a tiny but vital part of your central brain – is triggered when it receives signals from an almond-shaped cluster of neurons called the amygdala. It can't tell the difference between the types of emotions, just that those emotions are running high, so the reaction to cry is the same.

While the reason for crying makes no difference in neurological reactions, aesthetically speaking, happy crying is an altogether more attractive affair. The average happy cry only lasts three minutes, compared to seven minutes of sad crying, so things such as facial redness, puckered brows, a runny nose and puffy eyes don't tend to factor. Tears

of happiness are contagious and help improve a happy situation. 'It shows trust and promotes bonding, especially if the other person reacts appropriately,' says Gail.

So-called 'mirror neurons' (see p49 for more on this) in your brain are responsible for this phenomenon. When you recognise an emotion in someone, it triggers your neurons to signal empathy, so that the person you're with can see you understand how they are feeling. This is why seeing a loved one cry, through sadness or joy, can set off your own tears – you are in tune with them. You may even find the response is triggered when you identify with a character that cries in a film or book. 'It's part of sharing something special and becomes part of the experience,' explains Gail.

All of this means that people who experience high levels of empathy tend to cry a lot more than those who don't. They feel the pain and joy of others intensely, which is no bad thing.

### A cathartic release

Whether happy or sad, tears are still worth celebrating. Not only are you entrusting other people with your emotions and bonding with them, but you're also sending out a signal that you need support. 'Crying is often the first thing you do when you enter the world. It's a signal of need and distress,' explains Gail. 'According to the Freudian notion of catharsis, to cry is beneficial, while to keep tears in is toxic. Just think about therapeutic crying – all counsellors have a box of tissues in their room. This shows permission to cry and that crying can help.'

When a loved one dies or a relationship ends, the first emotional release is often crying. 'Even "wallowing" can be good,' says Gail, who gives the example of a patient who went into a shop for the sole purpose of purchasing a load of sad films. She was going to watch them alone and cry because she needed the release after the death of her sister some months previously.


The theory behind this is that tears cried during heightened emotional states not only release the

hormone prolactin, but also an adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), which stimulates the release of the stress hormone cortisol. This is why after a good cry you feel a significant release of stress symptoms, such as muscle tension, limb heaviness, and anxiety.

Some psychologists say that crying provides valuable learnings to store in our brains. For example, if we cry with remorse over betraying a loved one or acting selfishly, our hippocampus stores the memory of this act along with the overwhelming emotions that caused us to cry. It's believed this association then acts as a marker to dissuade us from acting

similarly in the future.

Further positive effects of crying, however, depend on a number of factors, according to professor Ad Vingerhoets, author of *Why Only Humans Weep: Unravelling the Mysteries of Tears* (OUP Oxford). In research comprising 5,000 participants, he found that whether mood improves after crying depends on personality and how others react. 'A depressed person seldom reports an improvement in mood,' he says. 'But the most important predictor of whether tears are therapeutic or not is how others react – with irritation, or comfort.'

So, if you consider yourself an empathetic, otherwise cheery person, and you can find comfort in a likeminded friend or partner, feel free to let your tears flow when you're feeling overwhelmed. Better still, watch your favourite weepy film together. You'll be left feeling emotionally lighter, more relaxed physically, and perhaps even closer to someone you love. 

The average  
happy cry  
only lasts  
three minutes  
compared to  
seven minutes of  
sad crying







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## FACTFILE

# Wave goodbye to psoriasis

Keep your skin smooth and soothed this winter with our simple solutions.

**P**SORIASIS AFFECTS THREE per cent of the UK population, with research showing two peaks of onset – late teens to early 30s, and between the ages of 50 and 60. It's an autoimmune condition, which causes thick, red, itchy and flaky patches called plaques on any area of the body, including the scalp, hands, feet and even groin.

Recent research on psoriasis found that changes in the skin begin when immunity cells called T-cells are triggered and become overactive, causing inflammation. The T-cells act as if they are fighting an infection or healing a wound, leading to the skin's renewal process speeding up. This means it takes just a few days to replace skin cells that usually take 21-28 days, leading to a build-up, which forms the flaky patches.

It's not yet clear what initially triggers the immune system to act in this way, but flare-ups are often brought about by factors such as stress or anxiety, injury to skin, hormonal changes, or it can be hereditary. It can also be exacerbated by the colder weather as the bitter air dries and irritates skin.

## Feed your defences

A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish oil, helps to reduce inflammation, while omega-6, found in sunflower and vegetable oils, can exacerbate it. To correct the balance, replace

vegetable oils and margarines with healthy fats such as olive oil, coconut oil and butter.

Avoid processed foods, as they often contain sugar and salt, which can lead to inflammation, adding further irritation. 'They

also contain high levels of quickly digested carbohydrates, which can upset the balance of natural flora in your gut as well as blood sugar and hormone balance. All of these factors link to skin problems,' says Shona Wilkinson, head nutritionist at nutricentre.com.

## Moisturise your skin

Keeping moisture locked into your skin is key in managing psoriasis flare-ups. To prevent your skin drying out, avoid washing every day if you can – this is usually a little easier during winter when it's cooler and you sweat less. When you do wash, a warm bath with oils is a pleasant and easy way of hydrating your skin and softening the plaques. Avoid products that foam, as they tend to contain soap or detergent, which can remove natural oils from your skin and dry it out. Instead, coconut oil or aloe vera-based products will help soothe and moisturise, or add a pouch of oatmeal flakes in the



### NEW MEDICATION

A cloned antibody, ixekizumab, currently in phase III trials for the treatment of psoriasis, has resulted in around 40 per cent of people seeing their condition clear up after 12 weeks.

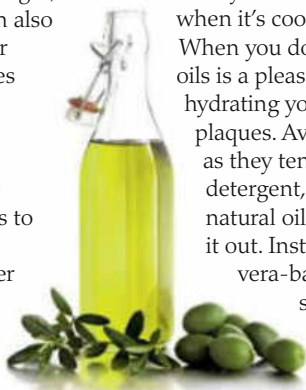
cut-off foot of some old tights to the bath. This will soften the water and help banish the itch. Finally, pat yourself dry as opposed to vigorously rubbing, which can aggravate sores.

## Find relief

- Bria Organics Relief Repair Replenish Balm (£12.95/60ml, [briaorganics.com](http://briaorganics.com)) is a new natural treatment available to soothe psoriasis. It's 100 per cent organic and contains ingredients such as beeswax, jojoba and rosehip to treat dry and sore skin conditions.
- Salcura has created Bioskin Zeoderm (£9.99/50ml, [salcuraskincare.com](http://salcuraskincare.com)) for those prone to more severe outbreaks. It contains linseed to reduce redness and inflammation, borage to help your skin retain moisture and zeolite for its ability to eliminate free radicals.
- Alternatively, some sufferers expose their skin to narrowband UVB light, which slows the rapid growth of skin cells associated with psoriasis. See your doctor for more information about this.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on psoriasis, visit [psoriasis-association.org.uk](http://psoriasis-association.org.uk).



# Nature's HEALERS

If a winter cold or flu strikes, harness the power of plants, herbs, seeds and vegetables, say Karin Berndl and Nici Hofer.

**W**E BOTH grew up in Austria where no herb or vegetable was too strange to be applied or consumed to help the body heal. During our childhoods, we took it for granted that natural healing was used to cure common ailments. Now, as adults, we know how fortunate we were. 'Vinegar socks' is probably the best-known traditional fever-cure in Austria, and we doubt there is an Austrian who hasn't heard of it.

Medicine over the past few thousand years has seen some rather interesting trends. Quite some time ago, plants and roots were all there was, doing the trick for no less than the Queen of Sheba and Cleopatra. Then, religion was believed to heal and cure, followed by potions. The trusty snake oil salesman delivered a great pitch, for sure, but only until people called his bluff and moved onto pills, which were quickly replaced by antibiotics. So today, did we come full circle and realise that the power of plants, herbs, seeds and vegetables in combination with hundreds of years of old techniques can help us heal naturally? We think so! The world seems ready for what has survived for so many generations...





## HERB POUCH

If you toss and turn at night, are kept awake with thoughts about tomorrow's to-do list, or are troubled by bad dreams, this aromatic remedy may help prevent nightmares and lead to a lovely, floaty, restful sleep.

### THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Chamomile flowers 3 tsp
- Peppermint 3 tsp
- Rosemary 3 tsp
- Sage 3 tsp
- Valerian 3 tsp
- Thyme 3 tsp
- Cotton fabric small piece
- String 1 piece

### GET STARTED

Place the ingredients in the centre of your piece of fabric and fold the corners in, so the herbs sit like the stuffing inside a cushion. Secure with string and place inside your pillowcase or next to it.

### WHY WE BELIEVE IT WORKS

**Chamomile** acts as a sedative and helps to relieve anxiety and insomnia. **Peppermint** is antimicrobial and antispasmodic. **Sage** contains antibacterial oils and can act as an antiperspirant, **thyme** calms the mind and relieves pain and **rosemary** is cleansing. **Valerian** (the most important ingredient) is calming, relaxing and has a soporific effect.

## FENNEL TEA

This tea is very soothing for infections of the mouth or throat. I drink several cups of it daily when I'm feeling ill. An additional effect is that it helps to treat flatulence. You can use fennel seeds or a fresh fennel bulb for the infusion, but the healing properties are strongest in the seeds.

### THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Fennel seeds 1 tsp, or Fennel bulb ¼, diced
- Water 250ml

### GET STARTED

Put the fennel seeds in a cup. Bring the water to the boil and pour over the seeds. Leave to infuse for 10 mins. Strain into a cup and drink.

### WHY WE BELIEVE IT WORKS

**Fennel** is high in vitamin C and contains antibacterial essences, which are anti-inflammatory. It loosens phlegm and has antispasmodic and antiseptic properties. Fennel also has a calming effect on the stomach and gut. In Austria, fennel tea is very popular and is given to babies with abdominal bloating and colic.







## HOT ONION MILK

You will probably find all the ingredients for this very simple recipe in your home without having to pop to the shops.

### THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Milk 500ml
- Onions 2 large, diced
- Honey 1-2 tsp

### GET STARTED

- 1 Heat the milk in a saucepan to a gentle simmer then add the onions. You can use almond milk, soya milk or water if you don't like the idea of using cow's milk.
- 2 Remove from the heat immediately and leave to infuse for 20 mins.
- 3 Strain into a cup or mug. Add the honey and drink the mixture to soothe your cough. Please make sure that you only add the honey just before drinking the milk, as honey is sensitive to heat.
- 4 If you don't drink all the onion milk at once, you can reheat the remainder gently in a saucepan.

### WHY WE BELIEVE IT WORKS

**Onions** loosen phlegm and have antibacterial as well as anti-inflammatory properties, amongst many others.

**Honey** has been prized for thousands of years for its healing properties. It strengthens your immune system, prevents bacterial growth and reduces fever. It is also antispasmodic or anticonvulsant, and mucus-dissolving.

## CHAMOMILE & SALT INHALATION

If you have a cold so bad you can't even breathe, we have the cure – just steam away the heavy head and blocked and swollen sinuses. And if that is not enough, this little gem of a remedy will also purify your skin and open your pores. We love side effects that make our skin look glorious, even when a head cold tries to ruin the day!

### THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Water 1 litre
- Dried chamomile flowers handful
- Sea salt 3 tbsps
- Towel large

### GET STARTED

- 1 Bring the water to the boil in a saucepan, then remove from the heat. Add the chamomile flowers and sea salt.
- 2 Hold your head, face down, over the pan, about 20cm away from the water, and cover your head with a large towel, being careful to keep the towel away from the heat source. I always leave a small gap between the pan and my towel at first to allow my face to get used to the heat.
- 3 Inhale for 10 mins and go to bed immediately after your treatment.

### WHY WE BELIEVE IT WORKS

**Chamomile** disinfects, is antispasmodic and also has anti-inflammatory properties.

**Sea salt** loosens phlegm, strengthens your immune system, and acts as a disinfectant.



Extract taken from *Vinegar Socks* by Karin Berndt and Nici Hofer (£12.99, Hardie Grant).





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## THERAPIST'S TOOLBOX

# THE POWER OF THE PEN

People have written down their thoughts and dreams for centuries. Therapist Jenny Gould explains how it creates emotional harmony.

A JOURNAL PROVIDES A space where you can hold a thoughtful, honest conversation with yourself, giving structure to those thoughts and bringing some clarity.

Research over the past 20 years has produced strong evidence for the many benefits of journaling. Not only can it improve your emotional wellbeing and make you happier, it boosts immunity, can reduce blood pressure and even enhance levels of fitness. Denying your feelings can lead to long-term stress and, ultimately, disease, but journaling can help you acknowledge your

emotions, get them off your chest, increase self-awareness and perhaps ask yourself 'why did I do that?' or 'what was really going on there?'

You can use your journal in a number of different ways:

- Try free writing. Divide the page into two columns and use the left side to write an uninhibited stream of thoughts. When you've finished, use the right side to make more objective comments.
- Offload your worries. Anxiety is part of life, and one way of stopping those ruminating thoughts is to take 10 minutes every day to get them out of your head and onto paper.
- Reflect on the positive. What did you learn today? What was better than you

expected? For what are you grateful? What was significant? What would you do differently next time?

- Write a letter but don't send it. This can be to anyone at all, dead or alive, and is particularly liberating if you have unresolved feelings of anger or guilt that need to be expressed.

- Write a potted history of your life, but in the third person to give you a fresh perspective. Stand back and consider what might be the key messages for you – are there any themes?

- Document your dreams. You are more likely to achieve your goals if you write them down, as it sends a message of commitment to your conscious and unconscious mind. Write down your

thoughts by hand, as research in neuroscience and brain imaging has discovered that doing this, as opposed to typing the letters, activates parts of your brain that help you to think, producing greater activity in areas on both sides of your brain making the whole

You are more likely to achieve your goals if you write them down.

process much easier.

Your journal will become like a friend who's always there. It's a place where you can make sense of life, so it's important to set aside some quiet time for writing. The key is to make it manageable and realistic – 10-20 minutes of time writing is usually enough to jot down your thoughts. There are no rules, except to be honest with yourself. You don't need to include everything, it's not a masterpiece and doesn't have to be perfect. Instead, make it something you look

forward to doing, rather than another 'must do'!

While it may take practise if you're not used to being introspective, if you stick with it for a month, you'll be surprised at the results!

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Jenny Gould is a stress management consultant and author of *Overcoming Perfectionism* (bookboon.com).



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# The incredible power of FRIENDSHIP

Having loyal, loving friends can get you through the darkest times and is something to celebrate. Here, our six ladies prove why rejoicing in those closest to you can keep you healthy and happy.

## 'ONLY NADINE KNEW HOW I TRULY FELT'

**Lisa Potter, 40, and her best friend Nadine, 26, from Nottinghamshire, laughed their way through the toughest days of their lives.**

I MET NADINE ON BOXING DAY 2012. The first thing I noticed was her amazing, bright red hair and her absolutely gorgeous baby boy that I really wanted to cuddle! I was sitting across from her in hospital while we both waited for that day's chemotherapy session.

'How did you get away with dying your hair?' I asked her, jealously. I'd been desperate to go pink but my doctors had told me it would interfere with my chemotherapy. 'I never read the leaflet!' she laughed. Even if she had read it, I suspected she'd have done it anyway. Nadine knew her mind and, at just 23, her strength blew me away. I knew within minutes that we'd be the best of friends.

Nadine had been diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma (a cancer that

develops in the lymph nodes) just four months earlier when she was 28 weeks pregnant with her son, Blake. She had to have him early at 33 weeks so she could start treatment as soon as possible. It was a scary time for her but her determination to be a mum was and still is her main focus, and I love that about her. She had Blake by her side for every appointment and hospital visit.

I explained to Nadine that I'd been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (a cancer that develops in the lymphatic system) two years earlier and that it was incurable. It can lay dormant inside me and flare up when

I'm least expecting it. When I met Nadine, it was in my chest and, a week earlier, I'd been on the brink of death. But like Nadine, I wasn't giving up either!

Nadine might be younger than me, but she always said I was the crazy one. I was always planning skydives, or going to pole fitness. With a life-threatening condition, you learn to live in the moment and it's fun to have a sidekick to do it with.

Chemotherapy is gruelling, tough – and so boring. But knowing that Nadine would be in the next bed made it bearable. It became a chance to catch up and have a giggle. We'd have wig days when we'd bring in our hairpieces and mess about. We'd laugh so loudly sometimes that the nurses had to shift us to a side room! We

laughed together, threw up together and cried together.

I had loving and supportive friends, but no one can truly understand what

“I know I can open up and tell her exactly how I am feeling.”



From left to right: Lisa receives her last treatment; elation after completing the 2013 Race for Life; Nadine four months into her cancer treatment, with her little boy, Blake – 'both bald together!'; friends for life – and seizing every single moment of every day!





Nadine and Lisa are supporting Cancer Research UK's campaign to beat cancer sooner. Visit [cruk.org](http://cruk.org) to find out more.

Lisa (left) and Nadine know their friendship will survive whatever life throws at them.



WORDS: GAIL SHORTLAND. PHOTOGRAPHS: CLIVE DOYLE, TOM CALTON

having cancer is like unless you've experienced the journey for yourself. With Nadine, I could open up and tell her exactly how I was feeling. We could compare pains, talk about the extreme tiredness, and admit to each other that, without nose hair, our noses were like dripping taps! We were more than friends – we called each other the 'chemo sisters'.

Cancer was like the 'inside joke' that only the two of us could understand. While friends wanted to take our pain away, we never sugar-coated anything for each other. Our fears were the same and it drove us on.

When both our relationships broke down during our cancer fight, we were there for each other. And when Nadine got the all-clear, I couldn't have been happier.

My chemo sister has been in remission for two and a half years and for now I'm feeling well enough to

take her scuba diving in a few weeks for our first lesson at a local swimming pool.

There's no hiding from the fact my condition is incurable, and I know that Nadine feels a bit guilty that she's now cancer-free, but as I watch her shine as a single mum, with her whole life ahead of her, I couldn't be happier.

When things get tough for me again, I know Nadine will be by my side in a flash because she's always there through the best and worst of times. Our friendship will survive it all.

**NADINE FARNSWORTH, 26, SAYS:**

Lisa is the most inspirational person I've ever met. Having Blake, now three, made me fight hard for my life but it was Lisa who kept my spirits up. It was

my darkest time and yet I've never laughed so much in my life!

Being a cancer survivor still has its problems – I suffer anxiety before check-ups, have the immunity of a toddler, and when I was advised to not have any more children it was very difficult. But without having cancer, I wouldn't have met Lisa. For that, I'm eternally grateful.



# 'CATHY TRAVELLED THOUSANDS OF MILES TO SUPPORT ME'

**Jacqui Cleaver, 36, from Poole, Dorset, was 6,000 miles away in South Africa when a familiar face arrived to offer support.**

CATHY AND I WENT TO SCHOOL together and I've felt so lucky to be her friend ever since. She's clever, quick-witted and has a huge heart, but above all she's fiercely loyal and that's something she has proved to me time and time again.

In December 2012, I discovered my dad, Bill, who had retired to South Africa, was dying from cancer. I dropped everything to fly there with my one-year-old son, George. I left my company, New You Boot Camp, in the hands of my partner Daniel, as Dad became my priority.

I'd only just seen him that June for George's christening so I was shocked how quickly he'd gone downhill. He was only 65 and it all seemed horribly unfair. I vowed to stay as long as he needed me, and the weeks turned into months. Dad was the first to see George take his first steps and that's something I'll treasure forever.

Cathy and I were in touch constantly and she knew how much I was hurting. When Dad died on March 6, 2013, I was devastated and felt so far away from home.

Days later, a car pulled into the driveway of my father's home and out stepped Cathy, clutching a bottle of Bombay Sapphire gin. I'd been holding everything in to try to be strong but I broke down on seeing her.

My group of eight school friends had clubbed together to buy Cathy a plane ticket so she could be by my side in my

hour of need. They dubbed it a 'send a friend, not flowers' mission. Cathy had even brought a hire car with a baby seat for George with her, and gave more support than I could have wished for.

She helped me write my eulogy to Dad, supported me through the funeral, did most of the packing, played with George and listened tirelessly while I grieved.

We flew back just four days after she'd arrived – fancy flying all that way for such a short time? It was selfless and an extraordinary display of kindness. She drove us back to the airport and even organised a stop-off on the way so George could see some baby lion cubs at a wildlife park. It was my birthday and she hadn't forgotten.

Back at home, Cathy continued to be there for me and the experience changed us both. We started to live

much more in the present. I gave Cathy some free sessions at New You Boot Camps, and she's recently completed the first leg of the Clipper Yacht Race from London to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I took a step back from the business and started to spend more time with my family. Losing Dad and seeing such an expression of friendship made me focus on the important things in life.

I'll never forget what Cathy and my other friends did for me during that difficult time. I'd travel any lengths to be by Cathy's side if she needed me because that's what true friends do and when you find someone that special you hang on to them for dear life.

## CATHY MUSSERT, 36, SAYS:

The thing I most admire about Jacqui is her grit. So often when I hit a problem I think 'what would Jacqui do' and that's the path I take. I treasure her friendship and value her opinions so highly. I didn't hesitate to travel to South Africa when she needed me because I just wanted to be there for her like she has been for me. I didn't think that my 20-year friendship with Jacqui could get any stronger but we both agreed that the experience deepened it even further. We'll always be there for each other.



On the way to Cowes Sailing Regatta off the Isle of Wight.



Jacqui (above left) and Cathy have been best friends since school.





Abigail (right) and Lucy met through networking and have become firm friends and fundraisers.

## ‘WITH LUCY, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE’

**Abigail Bowen, 42, from Brighton, set up the charity Handbags for Hospices and found a pal for life.**

MY BELOVED DAD, MIKE, SPENT HIS final days in the local Martlets Hospice in 2007, and it was impossible not to be touched by the devotion showed by the staff. I vowed that one day I’d give something back but I had no idea what a rollercoaster ride it would take me on – or that it would lead me to my ultimate sidekick, Lucy.

Three years later, the trend hit for clothes-swapping parties and I decided to use it to raise some money for the hospice. Handbags were always popular – one size fits all and you don’t need to get undressed to try one on! So, I approached Martlets about hosting an event where we sold handbags that local people had donated. They loved the idea, only they wanted me to run it.

I hadn’t a clue what I was doing but somehow I managed to find a café in Brighton to hold the event and more than 60 women turned up. Despite the chaos, we raised an amazing £2,000 and I breathed a sigh of relief that I’d pulled it off. Then the hospice asked if I’d do it again!

I’d met Lucy through a networking event a few years earlier and she’d offered to donate a few handbags, so I met her for coffee. ‘I can’t do it!’ I blurted to her. I didn’t know at the time that Lucy was going through a few personal problems – she never showed it. In my eyes she was confident, capable and had a background in event planning.

‘Can I help?’ she asked tentatively.

I nearly jumped into her arms with relief, and so Handbags for Hospices was born – a charity that raises money for end-of-life care by bringing women together for a fun night out. We’ve raised a huge £20,000 to date, and wow, it’s been fun!

Lucy and I have met celebrities, convinced

incredible designers like Celia Birtwell to create handbags for our cause and even pretended to sound grown up on the radio, but I can honestly say that my friendship with Lucy has been the best thing to come out of it all.

She brings out the best in people, including me, and she’s taught me so much. What’s more, we’ve had such a

“We squeal like teenagers and jump up and down when things go our way.”



laugh along the way.

Davina McCall, Zoe Ball, Paloma Faith – they are people I’d never have imagined I could approach to ask for handbag donations, and yet with Lucy, anything is possible. We’re definitely not cool though. We squeal like teenagers and jump up and down when things go our way.

I’d have run out of ideas years ago if it wasn’t for Lucy’s encouragement. Her passion is infectious and I feel so privileged that I’ve shared it all with her. We’ve achieved so much and it’s an honour to have her as a friend.

### LUCY WILKES, 47, SAYS:

When I first offered to help Abi, I was at a low point in my life. I was going through a separation, selling my home and struggling to stay positive. I was over the moon when she took a chance on me – even if I did have a lot to learn about handbags! Abi is the glam one and I’m the blagger. The unexpected highlight of it all is our friendship. She gave me back my sparkle. Together, it feels like we can achieve anything.





# Shine on!

These nine simple tips will help you feel confident wherever you go!

**T**HE GLITZ AND glamour of the party season is almost unavoidable. But just how dazzling do you feel? When you walk into a room, do you have the sparkle of a leading lady in a Hollywood movie – or do you feel more like an extra in somebody else's film? Well it's time to take the reins and be your own leading lady. Celebrate who you are and don't let nerves hold you back. It's your time to shine, and it doesn't have to be in a garish or bigheaded way, but with subtlety and class. You have an inner radiance that's just waiting to shine through. 'Your sparkle is your inner glow,' explains psychologist Doreen Virtue. 'It comes out naturally when you're enthusiastic about life. Think of a happy children, laughing and being themselves. Those children sparkle, and so can you.'

## 1 Supercharge your self-image

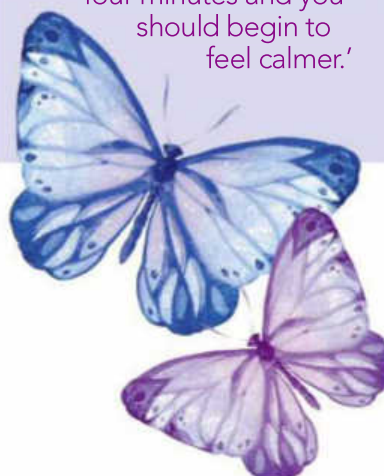
'Instead of dwelling on your perceived flaws, think about your good qualities,' says psychologist Anjula Mutanda. What do you like about yourself? Pick just one physical and one personal quality you've been complimented on – your eyes, your smile, your kindness or your quick thinking? This tricks your brain into operating more positively. Practice this repeatedly and it will become a habit.'

## 2 Try confident communication

Feeling lost for words in a social setting is not a great feeling. 'Rehearse how the event will unfold in your mind beforehand,' advises Anjula. Say, 'I will look amazing. I will talk confidently to other people. I will have a good evening'. Visualising positive outcomes in this way makes your brain expect positive outcomes, which means

## 3 BE A SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

Most people feel a flutter of nerves when attending a social function alone. 'Don't make it about you,' says life coach Mandy Lehto. 'Make it about other people. The best way to be the most interesting person in the room is to be interested in others. Reframe your nerves to excitement. Think, "I'm excited to meet new people and interested to find out about them." Remember, your breath is the easiest route to calmness, athletes and actors use breathing techniques before they perform. When nervous, your breath becomes shallow and panicked. So breathe in through your nose for a count of four, hold it for a couple of seconds, then exhale for four counts through your mouth. Do this for four minutes and you should begin to feel calmer.'



you'll feel more confident and relaxed. When you greet people, make brief eye contact and smile. Imagining you are confident, will help you to *be* confident. The only difference between a socially confident person and an anxious one is the story they tell themselves before they enter a room. A self-assured person thinks it will be fine; an anxious person thinks it will be terrible. So, take control of your thoughts, decide you'll be able to communicate confidently and you will.'

'Having an easy, flowing conversation with people you don't know well is about asking open-ended, positive questions that are appropriate to the situation,' says Anjula. 'Ask things such as: "what are you working on at the moment?"'

## 4 Build your body language

Strong, confident body language will transform your presence from shy to sparkling. 'Stand up straight, raise your gaze, and make eye contact,' says Anjula. 'As soon as you alter your body language to be more assertive, this improves your mood, making you feel more confident. Take centre stage by gravitating to the middle of a group, rather than the edges. A central position makes it easier for people to notice and interact with you. If you stand with slumped shoulders, stare at the floor, or use your hair as a shield to cover your face, you prevent others from connecting with you.'

## 5 Live in the moment

Don't waste time worrying about the past or fretting over the future; your time to shine is now. 'The past is over and the future hasn't happened yet,' says Mandy. 'You have one time to live and that's in the present. When you're at a party, practise mindfulness techniques, which will help you exist in the present moment instead

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of worrying about what needs doing tomorrow. Being mindful will help you focus and connect to others more easily.

Switch off your autopilot and take note of your surroundings to keep focused. The more mindful you are, the calmer you'll become, allowing you the headspace and confidence to sparkle.

## 6 Express yourself

Your opinions matter. So if family and friends often talk over you, or dismiss your ideas, here's how to make yourself heard. 'If your voice feels lost, even to those who care about you, it's likely people are not used to listening to you, so you'll need to teach them to treat you differently,' says Anjula. 'You can do this with a combination of verbal and non-verbal cues, for instance, use pauses between sentences to force yourself to speak slowly and clearly, and to emphasise what you're saying. Use the pronoun "I" as this draws attention to your opinion. Change your language to be more assertive, such as, "I would like you to listen to me because this is how I feel".

## 7 DE-STRESS

'Everyone experiences stress,' says psychologist Doreen Virtue, 'but living in a constant state of anxiety will stop you sparkling. Chronic anxiety can lead to addictions because you may turn to alcohol or chemicals in the hope of relaxation. Plus, stress hormones can cause your body to store fat in the stomach area, leading to weight gain.'

Doreen recommends a couple of ways to reduce mental and physical stress. 'Try to stretch your arms and legs at home before a big event or nip to the loo when you get there before you start socialising. It's common to hold your breath and tense your muscles when stressed. But this freeze response holds fear in your body, so make sure you get up and walk around as much as possible if you're feeling nervous. A couple of minutes of stretching can really help you relax.

'Carry a little bottle of lavender essential oil in your handbag so you can inhale the fragrance throughout the event. This scent has been scientifically shown to increase calmness and relaxation helping you to de-stress mentally.'

WORDS: ANGELA KENNEDY.  
PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY.



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'A slightly humorous way to deal with family and friends who don't listen is to spell out the letters in the phrase "listen to me". This forces the person to pause and work out what you've just said. They'll get the point and it will hopefully make them smile too.'

## 8 Embrace positive chatter

Is there a little voice in your head saying other people are better than you? This negative chatter can clutter your mind, blocking out the positives. 'Many people are attached to having the mindset of a victim by thinking, "she's better than me because she's more successful/beautiful/wealthy",' says Mandy. 'This way of thinking means you're not taking responsibility for yourself and it stops you achieving your dreams. You have to make a conscious choice to leave this negative self-talk behind.'

'The word 'confidence' means to trust in yourself. Start doing this by making your thoughts more positive just before you go to a party – remind yourself of your strengths and forget about the weaknesses. Trying something new each day is a great way to grow your confidence, and a social gathering is the ideal place to put this into practice. So wander over and start a conversation with someone new. Don't obsess about it, just do it.'

## 9 Practise mirroring

Ever wondered why socialising seems so effortless to some people? They might not realise it but they're probably doing what's called mirroring. This is where you adopt the same posture, gestures and even speech and breathing patterns as the person you're talking to. US self-development guru Tony Robbins is an advocate of using mirroring to quickly build rapport in all situations. For example, if the other person is tilting their head, tilt yours; if they have an expressive face, be expressive too; if they speak really fast, do the same, or if they are quiet and introverted, don't be loud or use huge gestures. This all helps put the other person at ease and builds a connection. And, when you truly get in sync with someone, mirror neurons fire in your brain to make you feel and act in a similar way to the other person. This is part of what helps us bond with one another. So, be upbeat, smile, laugh and enjoy yourself – before you know it you'll be the life and soul of the party!

# Sparkle in style

Your sparkle comes from within, but the way you look on the outside can affect the way you feel inside and also how people perceive you. 'Your clothes showcase you because the way you dress sends a message to others about how you see yourself,' says life coach Mandy Lehto. Follow Mandy's tips for adding sparkle to your style...

## UNDERWEAR MATTERS

Confidence starts with good quality lingerie. This doesn't necessarily mean ultra-sexy smalls – it means a bra that fits well. Avoid straps that cut into your skin and make sure the cups firmly but comfortably support you. Wearing well-fitting underwear will give you a smooth silhouette, helping your clothes fit better so you're more likely to stand taller and gain more of a presence.

## FIND YOUR CONFIDENCE ZONE

Think about what colour or type of garment you associate with confidence and what makes you feel good. Ask yourself, 'what does confidence look like for me?' For many people, bright colours make them feel bolder, whether that's a flash of a turquoise scarf or chunky statement jewellery. You may feel ravishing in a red dress or you may hate red. So, try it on and find out how you feel. Sharp tailoring can be a good option because a well-cut suit jacket can improve your posture making you stand taller and preventing you from slouching.

## TRY POSITIVE ASSOCIATION

Clothes can take on a psychological association with success. For instance, if you wore a particular pair of shoes to a work meeting, or on a date, which turned out very well, you might subconsciously associate those shoes with confidence and positivity. So, wear them again to

replicate this feeling. If you start the day thinking you'll feel great, you will naturally shine.

## DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Clothes are like a visual language helping you to project a different image of yourself to suit different situations. You might want to feel confident in a smartly tailored trouser suit for an important work presentation, while at a party you might want to feel like a film star in a dress and high heels. So decide how you want to present yourself that day, then choose the appropriate clothing to empower you to be that person.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

Doreen Virtue is author of *Don't Let Anything Dull Your Sparkle* (Hay House UK, £9.99).

Anjula Mutanda is resident psychologist for Channel 5's *Autopsy* series, and author of *How To Do Relationships* (Vermillion, £9.99). Life coach Mandy Lehto – [mandylehto.com](http://mandylehto.com).

# NUTRIENTS *unpacked*

## Feel 'A' ok!

The first in our new series focusing on micronutrients reveals how vitamin A does a whole lot more than just improve your night vision!

**T**HERE'S A GOOD REASON why your grandma told you to eat carrots – they are one of the best plant sources of vitamin A. While you might thank antioxidant vitamin C for warding off colds and flu, it's vitamin A that's the superstar when it comes to your body's overall health, keeping your immune system strong. It's responsible for a wide number of specific immune functions, including antibody production, inflammation management and cell protection and renewal – particularly in your gut and respiratory tracts. The cell-renewing characteristics of vitamin A also work to protect your skin, alleviating conditions such as psoriasis, and healing wounds and sunburn. This is why vitamin A derivatives, known as retinoids, are found in many repairing and anti-ageing skin creams.

Vitamin A also keeps your vision healthy by helping the light-reactive cells operate in your retina – hence the propaganda around carrots helping you see in the dark. However, eating plenty of vitamin A-rich veggies does mean you'll find it easier to see in dim lighting, plus your risk of conditions such as glaucoma decreases.

### WHAT ARE MICRONUTRIENTS?

All vitamins and minerals are micronutrients, which living things need to develop and survive. We need them in small quantities – milligram and microgram amounts – as opposed to larger amounts of fats, carbs and proteins, which are called macronutrients.



### THE VERY FIRST VITAMIN

**When scientists first started making connections between what we eat and how healthy we are, they concentrated on protein, fat and carbohydrate. But, they realised there must be more to our food than those three components when they began to observe some people, who ate adequate quantities of foods but of limited types, suffering from conditions such as blindness (lack of vitamin A), beriberi (lack of vitamin B) and scurvy (lack of vitamin C).**

**In 1912, biochemist Frederick Hopkins identified a substance in milk that was neither fat, carb nor protein, which he named an 'accessory factor'. Scientists found that these smaller 'accessory factor' nutrients were required to carry out various processes and build cell structures in the body.**

**Up until 1920, the first 'accessory factor' – vitamin A – was simply called 'unidentified dietary factor fat-soluble A'. But, from 1921, when other related, organic micronutrients were discovered, scientists began to label the vitamins, depending on the order in which they were classified. Hence A, the Bs, C, D, E and K. The missing letters were either reclassified, or debunked. For example, vitamin F was reclassified as an essential fatty acid. In the 1940s, they also became referred to as micronutrients, alongside minerals.**

### Vitamin A in your diet

Around 700 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin A – from retinol or carotenoids – is a perfect amount to maintain good health. Retinol is the name for animal sources of vitamin A, from meat or dairy, while plant sources are called carotenoids. The best plant sources are anything green, yellow or orange, such as carrots of course, but also sweet

potatoes and spinach. As vitamin A is fat-soluble, fat needs to be present in order for your body to absorb it. This means it's important to eat plant sources of vitamin A along with a food containing fats, such as nuts,

avocados, olive oil, or other healthy fats such as fish or coconut oil. Retinol sources from meat, eggs and dairy often contain fat already. Make sure you opt for full-fat milk instead of semi-skimmed though to get maximum absorption.

If you take multiple supplements or eat liver-based foods such as pâté more than twice a week, you could be ingesting too much vitamin A. It's not advisable to have more than 2,300mcg a day from animal sources or supplements. In some cases, too much retinol can lead to liver problems or lower bone density. This is why the NHS advises women who've been through the menopause to regularly have no more than 1,500mcg of retinol per day, due to the fact that it's harder for your body to metabolise excess amounts of the vitamin at this age, so it could contribute to osteoporosis. However, there's no upper limit for carotenoids – in other words you can't have too much veg!

Vitamin A deficiency is rare in the UK – it's more common in poor parts of the world where the diet lacks a range of fresh vegetables, causing digestive problems such as irritable bowel, or even night blindness.

If you have a range of healthy foods in your diet, your balance of A is likely to be perfect. And with the nights now drawing in, there's all the more reason to pile your plate high with colourful veg. The vitamin A boost will keep your vision strong in the dark, and you'll stave off winter bugs to boot.



## VITAMIN A AND YOUR BODY



**EYES** The vitamin A you eat converts to the form your body uses, retinal (not to be confused with retinol). In your eyes, retinal binds to a protein called opsin, which helps form your retina cells. A study by the National Eye Institute found that keeping vitamin A topped up could reduce your risk of age-related macular degeneration by about 25 per cent.



**SKIN** Retinoic acid is a metabolite of vitamin A that takes care of skin cell growth. It works by switching on genes that repair skin cells, while switching off ones that are damaged. The beauty and pharmaceutical industries have synthesised retinoid for topical products, which signal cells to grow at a faster rate, bringing younger skin to the surface.



**IMMUNITY** Once vitamin A has been processed by your digestive system, one of its jobs is to bind to your innate immune cells. The retinal acts as a homing beacon to keep these vital immune cells in place within your intestinal mucosal barrier. Alongside your skin, this barrier is the main thing that protects you from disease and infection.

## A PLATE OF A

**Scrambled eggs**

By starting your day with two eggs scrambled and a knob of butter, you're setting your body up with around 270mcg of retinol, plus a healthy source of fat for your body to help absorb the vitamin.

**Sweet potato with cheese**

The bright orange flesh of sweet potato indicates that it's high in carotenoids – a large one has 1,730mcg. By combining it with 100g full-fat cheese (364mcg), you've got a good source of fats to break down the vitamin A.

**A glass of grapefruit juice**

Orange and yellow fruits have high levels of carotenoids. A glass of grapefruit juice will give you around 50mcg of plant-based vitamin A, as well as 156 per cent of your daily value of vitamin C – a powerful combo of cell healers.

## VITAMIN A STAR BUYS

- There's nothing but 100 per cent pure carrots in James White Organic Carrot Juice. £2.75, Waitrose.
- Snack your way to vitamin A with Crispy Natural's Crunchy Carrot Crisps with Cajun Spices. The crisps are air dried, with only natural flavourings added. 80p, [healthysupplies.co.uk](http://healthysupplies.co.uk).
- Containing natural sweeteners and with a pleasant fizz, try Get More Vitamin A drink. £6.36 (for four), [supermarkets.com](http://supermarkets.com) or [moredrinks.co.uk](http://moredrinks.co.uk).



## SOURCES OF A (per 100g)

**RETINOL: have no more than 1,500mcg daily**

Calves liver: 25,200mcg  
Chicken liver pâté: 10,500mcg  
Cheddar: 364mcg  
Eggs: 120mcg  
Full-fat milk: 36mcg  
Tinned sardines: 10mcg

**CAROTENOIDS: no limit**

Carrots (raw): 11,700mcg  
Sweet potato (roasted): 5,140mcg  
Kale (cooked): 3,300mcg  
Spinach (boiled): 2170mcg  
Apricots (dried): 645mcg  
Mango: 700mcg

In WWII the British government praised the RAF's extraordinary night-fighting success, saying it was down to carrots!

- Next month: Niacin (vitamin B3) for heart health.

# WHEN TO eat organic

We all want healthy, nutritious food, but what's worth buying organic and where could we make savings? Angela Dowden investigates.

**O**VER THE PAST decade we've become more aware about what goes on during the production of our food. Organic farming has given us more opportunities than ever to reduce our exposure to pesticides and the effects of overfarming – one of which is reduced nutrients in the soil. But, there's no escaping the fact that organic produce costs more than conventionally produced food. So in January, when money is often a little more stretched than at other times of year, how can we still get plenty of high-quality nutrition without blowing the budget, and when is it worth forking out for organic versions of our favourite foods?

## MILK AND DAIRY

At only around 75p for two pints, standard milk is an inexpensive way to bump up your intake of protein, minerals and vitamins. It's reassuringly low in pesticide residues too, according to results from the UK Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food. Given this, are there convincing health reasons to spend the extra 50 per cent or so on organic milk? 'I'd argue yes, because the way organic cows graze

naturally on grass alters the fat profile of the milk,' says Rob Percival, policy officer at the Soil Association. There are now six studies that have found that organic whole and semi-skimmed milk has more heart-healthy omega-3 and fat-soluble nutrients than non-organic. One of these fat-soluble vitamins is E, which plays a role in maintaining the immune system and healthy skin.

'The most up to date and reliable of these studies was carried out at

Glasgow and Liverpool

Universities and found

that whole organic

milk from UK

farms was on

average 68 per

cent higher in

essential

omega-3 fat.'

There's a

catch though

– skimmed

milk does not

have any fat or

fat-soluble

nutrients in it at

all, and, overall, the

level of good fat, even in

full-fat milk, is fairly insignificant.

'Compared with the amount of omega-3 you get by having just one portion of oily fish a week, the amount that organic milk can provide is pretty insignificant,' says Dr Frankie Phillips, a spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association.

One of the nutrients that all milk provides in meaningful quantities is calcium, which is needed for strong bones. However, you only efficiently absorb and use it if you have enough







vitamin D, which some people become deficient in over winter due to lack of sunlight. If you think this applies to you, try Vitabiotics Ultra Vitamin D3, £5.10. Milk also provides vitamin B2, which is important for the nervous system, and iodine, required for the body to make key hormones that control your metabolic rate. 'Conventionally produced milk is a good provider of both, whether full fat, reduced fat or fully skimmed,' says Dr Phillips.

Another common consideration when buying organic is the health of the cows. In industrial dairy farming, the animals are more likely to become stressed due to cramped conditions, so from a welfare point of view this could affect your choice. Thankfully, UK dairy and meat production doesn't involve the addition of growth hormones like in the United States, but the conditions may mean that industrial cows require more frequent antibiotics than organic herds. However, DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) ensures that before any veterinary medicine is authorised for use in food-producing cows, tests are carried out to ensure residues don't pose a risk to consumers.

And how about cheese, yoghurt and eggs? 'I've not seen any convincing evidence that there's a significant nutrition benefit from choosing premium or organic versions of these either,' says Dr Phillips. 'Some pricier eggs, including organic eggs, can be richer in omega-3 because the hens that produce them are given different types of feed, but again, if you eat oily fish a few times a week, there's no point in spending extra on these.'

While free-range eggs come from chickens that are free to roam, their feed won't be as natural as that given to organic chickens, which doesn't contain unnecessary pesticides or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Eggs from hens raised on grass are preferable, as their yolks are deeper yellow and have higher levels of lutein and zeaxanthin, both important for eye health.

At the end of the day, it largely depends on your personal preference, and whether the potential inclusion of synthetic ingredients, or different production methods, bothers you.

## VEGETABLES

There is still a debate among experts as to whether it's worth buying organic veg. Back in 2009, a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*



concluded that there was little difference in nutrient quality between organic and conventional produce. More recently, in 2014, a study from the *Journal of Nutrition* concluded that organic crops – including fruit, vegetables and cereals – had significantly higher levels of antioxidants, significantly lower levels of pesticides and lower levels of the toxic metal cadmium.

‘It was the biggest review of studies done to date into the relative merits of organic versus conventionally produced crops. It robustly supports the idea that you are doing your health a favour by choosing organic vegetables where you can,’ says Rob.

‘Organic veg needn’t be much more expensive if you sign up to a local box scheme, which you can search for online, or try checking out local farmers markets,’ he suggests. ‘This way you can cut out the middle man and obtain seasonal healthy produce – such as kale and carrots at this time of year – direct from the producer.’

One of the other reasons you might consider paying a bit more for organic veg would be to cut down on pesticides. But if your finances prohibit, it’s worth knowing that scrubbing or peeling vegetables, or giving salad a good rinse under running water, will help to reduce any chemicals that do remain. Buying British is another good strategy, as UK-produced fruit and veg tend to come up, on average, slightly cleaner pesticide-wise in tests than imported varieties.

Some vegetables are naturally less prone to pesticide contamination than others, too. Onions, for example, are low risk because they have several layers of skin that get peeled off before you reach the edible parts underneath. So if you’re looking for ways to save, the following lists from Pesticide Action Network UK can help you decide when to buy organic and when not:

● Vegetables likely to have the fewest pesticides: corn on the cob, leeks,

aubergines, onions, asparagus, broccoli.

● Vegetables likely to have higher levels of pesticide residue: bagged leaves, podded beans and peas, cucumbers.

‘I think it’s fair to say that the jury is still out, and even if organic veg does contain more antioxidants, we’re not sure about the precise relevance of this to human health,’ says Dr Phillips.

‘What would really defeat the object would be eating fewer portions of the

show organic tomatoes have 55 per cent higher levels of vitamin C than non-organic ones.

‘There are plenty of good reasons to invest in organic produce for your fruit bowl,’ says Rob. ‘For antioxidants, switching to organic crop consumption is equivalent to eating one or two additional portions of fruit or vegetables per day. With greater nutrient and antioxidant density, every mouthful of organic fruit can count for more.’

Paying more for organic fruit will almost certainly net you fewer pesticides, too. Research from

Newcastle University found that non-organic fruit had the highest pesticide frequency (75 per cent of samples), of any of the food groups tested.

Some fruits are better organic than others. For example, non-organic tomatoes tend to have higher levels of pesticide residue, particularly if they’re not grown in Britain, where pesticide use is kept to a bare minimum. Most of the tomatoes in our supermarkets are imported from Spain, where they use more, albeit very regulated, pesticides.

It’s also worth knowing that bananas – the UK’s favourite fruit – rarely contain significant amounts of pesticide as their skin protects them. Citrus fruits and avocados can often contain residues but, again, these tend to be left behind in the skins. Here’s a guide to other popular fruit:

● Likely to have fewest pesticides: plums, kiwis, raspberries, melon.

● Likely to have higher levels of pesticide residue: apples, grapes, pears, berries. For a full list, visit [pan-uk.org](http://pan-uk.org).

But if choosing organic means you have to limit the variety of fruits you buy, it’s best to simply stick to conventionally grown ones. ‘The first and essential priority is getting your five a day, regardless of whether it is organic or not,’ says Rob.

If you want to save money, and avoid fruit going off, you could buy it frozen. For example, Tesco frozen blueberries cost £2 for 350g, but the fresh variety costs £2 for 150g, making the frozen ones less than half the price. ‘Freezing doesn’t deplete any nutrients, and frozen fruit may even be more nutritious compared to fresh that’s been



Scrubbing or peeling vegetables will help to reduce any potential chemicals on non-organic produce.

organic varieties because they were too expensive.’

What we do know is that whole vegetables, including all their fibre, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, are very good for you and the more different varieties you eat every day, the better it is for your overall health.

## FRUIT

Organic fruit, such as apples, berries and grapes, is richer in a range of desirable antioxidant plant compounds compared to its conventionally produced counterparts. Anthocyanins, for example, which are found particularly concentrated in purple fruits and berries and are associated with healthier, more flexible arteries, were on average 51 per cent higher across organically grown crops.

This backs up other findings that



left to sit around on the shelf for a while,' says Dr Phillips. It's also now easier to find organic frozen fruit. The Goodness Direct website (goodnessdirect.com) has plenty from which to choose, including Natural Cool Organic Cranberries, 300g, £2.56. And online food retailer Ocado (ocado.com) has a large range of frozen fruit including the organic Duchy from Waitrose Frozen English Raspberries, 200g, £3.49.

## MEAT

Meat and fish can make up a large chunk of your food budget, so it's important to spend wisely in order to get the greatest nutritional value for your money. The problem is that the cheaper the meat, the more processed it tends to be. Processed meat – anything that's been through a preservation process with smoking, salting or additives – recently hit the headlines after it was linked to increased risk of cancer. The recommendation is that we shouldn't eat more than 500g a week of red meats (lamb, beef including minced beef and pork including sausages) and processed versions such as ham, bacon and frankfurters should be avoided as far as possible.

This doesn't mean that you need to bankrupt yourself buying premium cuts of meat though. 'Some cheaper meats that don't go through a process are good – such as slow-cook beef braising steak for example,' says Dr Rosalind Miller, a nutrition scientist at the British Nutrition Foundation. 'Other cheap and rich sources of vitamins and minerals include offal such as liver and kidneys.'

Another factor in the debate is over the feed that's

given to the animals and their living conditions. All organic animals are free range, roaming on or eating pastures that have little or no herbicides or pesticides, while non-organic ones can be fed grains that may have been exposed to pesticides. When it comes to beef, organic or not, most British cows are 'forage fed', meaning they have access to fresh grass or hay at

least some of the year, unlike US cows that don't eat any grass – only grains. Industrially farmed pigs or chickens that are often in cramped conditions and inside all year will be less active, get less sunlight and become more stressed – factors that many organic meat eaters say reduces meat quality, as well as being bad for the animals' welfare.

'Eating less meat altogether is good advice from a budget point of view,' says Dr Phillips. 'It's better for us and for the planet to have a diet that is more plant-based. Pulses like beans, chickpeas and lentils are a nutritious alternative for days when you want to cut down on meat or go meat free.' Overall, you're better off buying a few quality organic cuts of meat and having them 2-3 times a week, rather than daily, low-quality processed meat.

## FISH

When it comes to fish, this is an area of your budget where you can definitely save money and still reap huge nutritional benefits. Particularly if you love tinned mackerel! 'Tinned fish is so cheap, but it's just as good for you as an expensive salmon fillet. I know

some people aren't mackerel fans, but just mash some with a little soft cheese to make a tasty toast topper and you may change your mind,' says Dr Phillips. 'It's a great source of healthy omega-3, vitamin D and calcium.' A typical serving of mackerel has

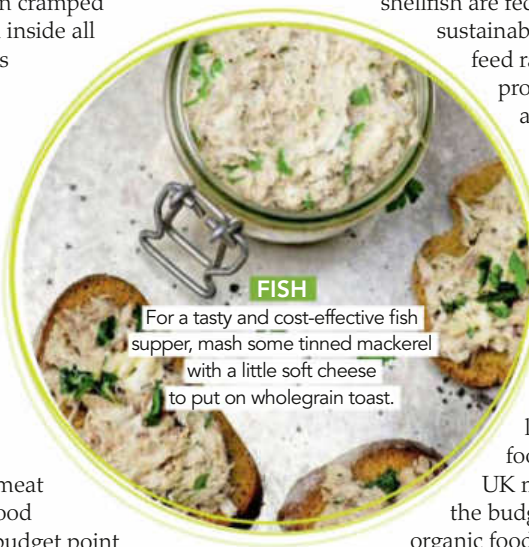
18 per cent of your daily value (DV) of healthy fats; 46 per cent DV of calcium; and 120 per cent DV of vitamin D.

Most fish, organic or not, are farmed in controlled waters to meet UK food standards. However, organic fish and shellfish are fed on

sustainable, natural feed rather than processed pellets, and are kept in lower-density stocks so they're less likely to get stressed or ill and require antibiotics.

Overall, the strict legislations on food quality in the UK mean that even the budget, non-organic foods won't really

do you harm, but if you're looking for better quality – particularly with meat or eggs – then opt for organic where you can.



**FISH**  
For a tasty and cost-effective fish supper, mash some tinned mackerel with a little soft cheese to put on wholegrain toast.



**MEAT**  
Opt for a few cuts of organic, grass-fed beef rather than processed meats.

## PESTICIDE KNOW-HOW

Whether in animal feed or on fruit or veg, the UK has strict legislations on pesticide use for growers and farmers. For example, the insecticide dieldrin was banned in the UK in the 1980s after it was found that sustained ingestion through working with or living near where it was used caused headaches and vomiting.

Here are common some pesticides sanctioned for use in the UK, and the crops on which they may be found:

- **Chlormequat**: a plant growth regulator used on pears and wheat.
- **Imazalil**: a fungicide used on fruit such as bananas, oranges and also cucumbers.
- **Carbendazim**: a fungicide used commonly on apples, pears and oranges.
- **Glyphosate**: a herbicide found on crops such as corn and rapeseed.
- **Chlorpropham**: stops potatoes sprouting in storage.

An anatomical illustration of a human torso in a blue, semi-transparent style. The liver is highlighted in a bright orange-yellow color, glowing with a starburst effect. The background is a dark blue gradient.

# LOVE *your* LIVER

This clever organ is working particularly hard this time of year, so take the opportunity to ensure it's functioning at its very best.

**T**HERE'S NOTHING LIKE A cool glass of bubbly to kick off a party. Enjoying a tipples or two is all part of the festive fun, and the key is to maintain that vital balance between treating yourself now and again, and healthy living. Fatty foods and alcohol can make your liver work harder than usual, but thankfully it's easy to keep it functioning optimally.

When Roman anatomist Claudius Galenus discovered this vital organ, he soon found it was responsible for many of the body's vital functions that allow us to live – hence the name liver. Your largest organ, the liver is located on the right-hand side of your abdominal cavity underneath your diaphragm and behind your ribs, weighing in at 1.5kg. 'Your liver is considered a gland – an

organ that secretes chemicals – because it produces bile. This substance is vital in your body's digestion of fats,' explains Professor Patrizia Burra from United European Gastroenterology. Its main job, however, is to filter your blood. 'The liver gets blood from two distinct sources: the hepatic artery and the portal vein,' says Professor Burra. Oxygen-rich blood flows in through the



hepatic artery, while nutrient-rich blood from your intestine comes through the portal vein. The liver then filters this blood of any accumulated waste and passes it on to the rest of your body to use. But that's not all – your liver copes with around 500 different tasks in one day (see box, right).

So that's the standard day job for your liver, but what about, say, the morning after an indulgent dinner party? 'The average person will take about an hour to process 10g of alcohol – the amount in a standard drink such as a small glass of wine or a single measure of spirits. Around 20 per cent of alcohol is absorbed in your stomach, but the rest is absorbed from the small intestine and converted by enzymes into acetaldehyde,' says Professor Burra.

This cell-killing toxin is fought hard by your liver's counter-attack of glutathione, which detects the acetaldehyde and makes it non-toxic. Your liver can only make so much glutathione at a time, hence why acetaldehyde damage can occasionally win over and leave you with typical hangover symptoms of dizziness and nausea. Thankfully, any damage from occasional drinking is easily reversible when you help your liver recover.

For a start, it's best to have at least a two-day break from alcohol if you've had a drinking session. 'Your liver is a robust organ,' says Professor Burra. 'However, alcohol consumption of 60-80g per day (about 75-100ml/day) for 20 years or more in men, or 20g/day

(about 25ml/day) for women significantly increases the risk of liver disease from acetaldehyde's long-term tissue damage.'

It's not just booze that alerts your liver's battle stations; a diet too high in processed fat and sugar can also cause it harm. Excess fat storage in your liver can cause very similar symptoms to alcoholic liver damage such as fatigue

and pain, as the cells inflame then scar.

Although obesity is the main cause, it can also be due to factors such as diabetes or rapid weight loss, as your liver stops being able to process fat properly. Thankfully, it has a remarkable ability to regenerate.

'Your liver replaces damaged tissue with new cells when needed,' says Professor Burra. In fact, it can repair up to 75 per cent of damaged tissue with newly rendered cells, then stop once your liver's functioning normally again.

Keeping alcohol consumption in check is an easy way to ensure your liver stays healthy, but there are other conditions that can affect its health too. Infections, such as parasites and viruses, can cause inflammation that reduces liver function – namely hepatitis A, B and C. Autoimmune diseases, and diseases of the bile duct such as primary biliary cirrhosis and primary sclerosing cholangitis, can also affect it.

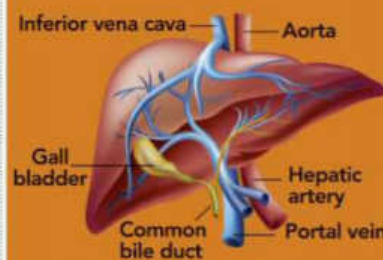
Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a condition where fat accumulates in the livers of people who drink little or no alcohol. Around 70 per cent of people with NAFLD are obese, but it can also be a side effect of

## Boost your liver's cleansing power by protecting it from toxins and optimising your diet.

### KEEPING YOU HEALTHY

Here's what your hard-working liver does to keep you healthy...

- Produces bile, a substance needed to digest fats. Bile salts break up fat into smaller pieces so it can be absorbed more easily in your small intestine.
- Stores vitamins and iron.
- Stores sugar (glucose) and converts it to functional sugar when your body's glucose levels fall below normal.
- Breaks down insulin and other hormones.
- Converts ammonia to urea, which is vital in metabolism.
- Destroys old red blood cells.
- Produces proteins that are fundamental for your wellbeing, such as coagulation factors, which are necessary for blood clotting.
- Detoxifies your blood to rid it of harmful substances such as alcohol and prescription drugs.



diabetes or some long-term medications. In its most serious form, the fat that accumulates can cause inflammation and scarring in the liver. The scarring, known as cirrhosis, interferes with the flow of your liver's blood and stops it functioning properly. Initial signs are weakness, discoloured skin and abdominal pain. If diagnosed early and the cause is treated, further damage can be limited.

### Keep your liver strong

Patrick Holford, author of *The 9-Day Liver Detox* (Piatkus), says there are simple ways to boost your liver's health through nutrition and lifestyle choices. Drinking around eight glasses of water a day to help flush toxins through your liver's filtration process is a good start. 'From a chemical perspective, much of what goes on in your body involves

Drinking eight glasses of water a day will help your liver flush out toxins.



substances being broken down, built up and turned from one thing into another,' says Patrick. 'A good 80 per cent of this work involves detoxifying potentially harmful substances, which is where the liver comes in. For example, a fat-based toxin is turned into something water-soluble that can be eliminated in your urine, in a process called conjugation. 'This is where your liver adds another compound to what it deems a toxin, so it can be excreted. There are four main substances included in conjugation: glutathione (an antioxidant), glycine (an amino acid), sulphur (a chemical element) and glucuronic acid (used in a process called glucuronidation). You can optimise the way these work by taking supplements (see box, right). 'In addition, have at least one portion of cruciferous vegetables a day, such as broccoli, cauliflower, kale, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. These are rich in a family of nutrients called glucosinolates, which are necessary for glucuronidation,' says Patrick.

It's also important to decrease acidity in your body, because bile that the liver produces is alkaline. 'Very high-meat diets create over-acidity in the blood, which your body has to neutralise by releasing alkaline calcium from bones,' says Patrick. 'Eating a diet with plenty of alkaline fruit and veg such as blackberries, apples, avocados, asparagus, squash and carrots, and less meat, is less taxing for your liver, giving it more energy for other vital functions.'

So, when popping the cork this New Year, top up on cruciferous veg at the buffet table to keep your liver in check.



## Liver-loving supplements

**Numerous supplements contain key nutrients designed to support your liver and boost detoxification. Patrick Holford suggests looking for ones that include the following...**

- **N-acetyl cysteine** is a powerful antioxidant and a superb antitoxin.
- **Milk thistle extract** binds to toxins to remove them from your body and increases glutathione levels to help the toxins shift more easily.
- **Cruciferous vegetable compounds** boost your intake of glucosinolates, enhancing the activity of several liver enzymes.
- **Methylsulfonylmethane (MSM)** is a sulphur compound widely known for liver support thanks to its ability to

build new, healthy tissues. An extra bonus is that it's implicated in younger-looking skin.

- **Ellagic acid** is a detoxifying substance found in blackberries, cranberries, pecans, pomegranates, raspberries, strawberries and walnuts.
- **Dandelion extract** helps increase the flow of bile to break down fats.
- **Alpha-lipoic acid** is often referred to as the 'universal antioxidant', and is found in vegetables such as broccoli and spinach, as well as offal.
- **Vitabiotics Liverel** (£17.99, [hollandandbarrett.com](http://hollandandbarrett.com)),

**HealthAid Livercare** (£8.32, [vitapure.co.uk](http://vitapure.co.uk)) and **Veganicity** (£10.95, [veganicity.com](http://veganicity.com)) all help maintain normal liver health.



Foods rich in ellagic acid activate detoxifying enzymes.

## MANUAL THERAPY

It's not all about what you put in your body – you can also help your liver from the outside using massage. Lie flat on your back and gently massage your gallbladder and liver area, which is located along the lower rib on the right side of the body. This helps to improve blood circulation in this area, as does stretching your abdominal wall. Try yoga poses such as cobra and supine spinal twists, which increase the liver's ability to detoxify.





# Fern Britton's

## MUSHROOM BREAKFASTS

*“Breakfast is the most important meal and mushrooms make the perfect ingredient. They’re a filling and flavoursome way to start the day.”*

### Shopping list

1

Spicy mushrooms on toast (for 1):

- 2 slices of ciabatta
- 200g chestnut mushrooms
- 1 knob of butter
- Dash of Worcester sauce
- 1 tbsp of crème fraîche

2

Fern's tasty weekend breakfast (for 4):

- 12 large chestnut mushrooms
- 8 rashers of smoked back bacon
- 4 eggs
- Cherry vine tomatoes
- Olive oil
- 1 garlic clove

For full recipes visit  
[www.justaddmushrooms.com](http://www.justaddmushrooms.com)

**NOT ONLY** are mushrooms a natural source of vitamin B<sup>5</sup>, (helping to reduce tiredness and fatigue), they are also low in fat. Just 80g or about four mushrooms make up 1 of your 5 a day, making them the perfect ingredient to help you start your day. For inspiration on how you and your family can enjoy mushrooms as part of breakfast, lunch or dinner, visit [www.justaddmushrooms.com](http://www.justaddmushrooms.com)



Campaign Financed with Aid from the European Union and British and Irish farmers



more to mushrooms

just add

MUSHROOMS

FUTURE-PROOF YOUR HEALTH

# Your **cervix** explained

As one of your body's 'gatekeepers', your cervix protects you from infection among other important functions.

Learn more about it and how to keep yours in good health.

**Y**OU MIGHT NOT GO through day-to-day life thinking about or paying particularly close attention to your cervix – it's a hidden and intimate part of your anatomy after all, but a very important one nonetheless. Although the size of a walnut, it plays a vital role in numerous functions, from the menstrual cycle to giving birth, and it may even be responsible for sexual pleasure for some women.

Situated at the bottom of your womb and above your vagina, your cervix is a cylinder-shaped neck of tissue that connects your vagina and uterus and allows things to pass in and out, hence the term gatekeeper. Size and exact shape vary slightly from woman to woman and can change with age.

'It increases in size and blood flow during pregnancy, while the reverse occurs during the menopause, when

the size decreases,' says gynaecologist Anne Henderson. 'It's extremely stretchy, as we know by its diameter at full dilation of labour – 10cm! A mix of fibromuscular and collagenous content enables it to virtually spring back to its previous size and shape after birth.'

There are two main parts. The first is the bit that can be seen from inside the vagina during an examination or smear test, known as the ectocervix. An opening in the centre of the ectocervix, known as the external os, opens to allow passage between the vagina and uterus. Secondly, there's the

endocervix, which is a tunnel through the cervix from the external os to the uterus. The overlapping border between the two is called the 'transformation zone.'

'Your cervix plays an important role in keeping you healthy, but many women don't fully understand how it works,' says Anne. 'It produces secretions or discharge, which have antibacterial properties. This helps to

keep out harmful bugs and

bacteria, which may lead to infection. The vagina is not a sterile organ like the bladder. This is due to its proximity to the bowel, separated only by the perineal body, which is the area of the vulva between the anus and vagina. Bacteria and other organisms can therefore pass very easily between the bowel and vagina, especially during intercourse or similar sexual contact.

## SEX AND YOUR CERVIX

**'There has been some published research that links the cervix to sexual pleasure and orgasm, suggesting it's responsible for making the whole sex experience more enjoyable,' says gynaecologist Anne Henderson. Some women's orgasms come from deep within the vagina and are described as 'deep' or 'uterine' orgasms.**

**Having regular smear tests is the best way to ensure your cervix is healthy and working as it should be.**



'In addition, as the penis is not sterile either, bacteria, fungi and viruses can also be directly transmitted if barrier contraception is not used,' says Anne.

'The cervix produces gloopy mucus, which bacteria stick to, so they can be killed and swept out through the opening of the vagina. Some hormones, such as oestrogen, found in the mini-pill, change the consistency and thicken the mucus, making it harder for an infection to take hold as well as preventing sperm from getting through. All in all the mucous alone is not 100 per cent fail-safe, as infections still occur from time to time, but it provides a pretty sturdy barrier and an added benefit for contraception.

'Most women will notice their mucus changes consistency slightly during the menstrual cycle to prevent or promote pregnancy by getting thicker or thinner.

'During childbirth, the cervix dilates widely to allow the baby to pass through, while during menstruation, it opens only slightly to permit passage of menstrual flow.'

The muscle of the uterus, or myometrium, contracts intermittently. Some women experience these as cramps, which can be very painful at times, especially during heavy periods when the blood flow is fast. The medical term for this is dysmenorrhoea.

## Look after your cervix

'Having regular smear tests is the best way to ensure your cervix is healthy and working as it should be, as many of the cells can be predisposed to infection due to the nature of the job they do,' says Anne. 'It's very important that sexually active women are screened regularly from 25 years old right through to the age of 65.

'I recommend all women aged 25-50 are tested every three years, while women aged 50-65 should be tested every five, and more frequently if they experience problems, such as pain, discomfort, intermittent bleeding or any irregularity in this area. The smear test will pick up on abnormal cells or infection, and will allow the nurse to check everything appears normal.

'One of the biggest problems that can develop in the cervix, which a smear test can highlight, is the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are around 100 subtypes of HPV but about five of them put you at high risk of progression to more serious problems, such as cancer. More than 80 per cent of the sexually active adult population has

## HOW TO SPOT PROBLEM SIGNS

Some symptoms could be a telltale sign of future problems so it's worth getting a full check-up from your GP if you spot anything unusual.

- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is an infection of the cervix and upper reproductive tract causing inflammation, also known as cervicitis. It's usually caused by infection – chlamydia, gonorrhoea and herpes are some of the culprits. You may experience greyish or pale yellow discharge, abnormal bleeding, such as after sex or between periods, pain during sex, difficult, painful, or frequent urination, or pelvic/abdominal pain or fever. If left, pelvic inflammatory disease can damage the reproductive organs.

- Cervical dysplasia is when abnormal cells are found in the cervix and can become cervical cancer. Cervical dysplasia is frequently discovered on smear tests and there can be little or no symptoms so regular tests are crucial.

- Cervical polyps are small, finger-like growths on the part of the cervix where it connects to the vagina. Polyps are painless and usually harmless, but they can cause vaginal bleeding after sex and between periods, so if either occurs see your doctor, who may refer you to a specialist for monitoring or polyp removal.

been exposed to HPV. In fact, it's more unusual *not* to have been exposed to it, and the more sexual partners you've had, the greater your exposure to different strains of the virus. Unfortunately, in many cases, there are often next to no symptoms for an HPV infection, so regular smear tests are key to finding it early before it can progress.'

To help keep your cervix in tip-top condition, Anne recommends:

### 1. KEEP IT NATURAL

'Most people want to wash and clean themselves thoroughly, but your

bacterial levels down below are perfectly balanced to do their job,' says Anne. 'The bacteria found on your vagina, known as lactobacillus, are naturally acidic and need to stay that way to function properly. Extreme washing or douching with highly perfumed or alkaline soap and water can knock them out of balance and cause inflammation and irritation and, particularly when douching, can also irritate as far up as your cervix, causing inflammation and pain.

'Try to wash around the general area and not directly on it. There are also some pH-friendly products designed specifically for your intimate area, so if you really want to use something, wash with one of those,' says Anne.

Try Canesten Canesfresh Feminine Wash, £8.99, designed to work with your natural pH.

### 2. WATCH WHAT YOU EAT

'There does seem to be a connection between certain foods and cervical irritation and inflammation, and those are mainly dairy and gluten,' says Anne. 'More research is needed, but because some people are intolerant to these food groups, it's thought that in some cases they affect the cervix, too. I recommend that women suffering from problems cut out these foods for 6-8 weeks to see whether it makes a difference, as well as visiting their doctors.

'As always, make sure you have a healthy, balanced diet, as this will give your immune system the best chance to fight any infections.'

Eating plenty of fruit, leafy greens and oily fish will boost your defences.

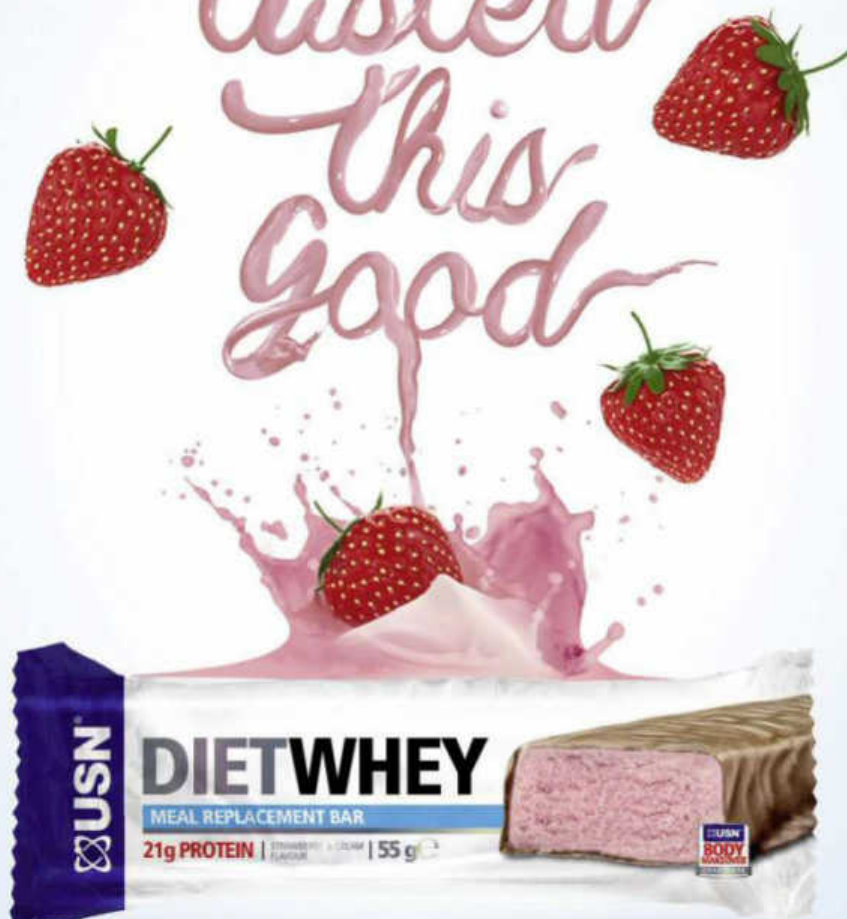
### 3. SAY NO TO NICOTINE

'Nicotine in cigarettes is one of the key causes of problems in the cervix but it's never as well documented as other causes such as HPV,' says Anne.

'We all know how lung cancer is linked to smoking, but it's also very detrimental to your cervical health. The nicotine gets into your bloodstream and has a particular liking for the cells in the cervix. It prevents any damaged cells there from healing, stopping your cervix from clearing away infection and heightening the risk of further complications. So if you do smoke, it's another good reason to quit.'

**January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. For more information, visit [cancerresearchuk.org](http://cancerresearchuk.org).**

*Slimming  
never  
tasted  
this  
good*



## THE HIGH PROTEIN BAR THAT WON'T RUIN YOUR DIET!

Our Diet Whey Bars are a convenient and tasty way to stop those hunger cravings. Available from [www.usn.co.uk](http://www.usn.co.uk) each bar contains 22g of protein and 18g of carbohydrates.

Only effective when combined with a balanced, energy-controlled eating plan and regular exercise.

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# FITNESS

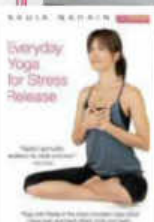
Discover the latest kit and events to keep you motivated this winter.

## Winter fun run

Get out and have fun in the 'snow' with Cancer Research UK's winter run series. The 10k routes hit Liverpool, Manchester and London. You can take in city landmarks, including Albert Dock, Etihad Stadium and St Paul's Cathedral, while being showered with fake snow along part of the route, and receive polar bear hugs at the finish. Races take place throughout January and February. From £26, [winterrunseries.co.uk](http://winterrunseries.co.uk).



Participants in last year's London winter run embrace the elements.

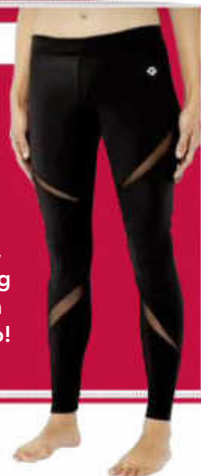


## RELAX WITH YOGA

When the rain is beating down and you don't fancy embracing the elements, why not try stress-relieving yoga? The *Everyday Yoga for Stress Release* DVD by Nadia Narain guides you through three simple but effective 20-minute programmes designed to bring peace to your mind, release tension and stretch your muscles. £10.99, [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk).

## BE FREE TO MOVE

Feel unrestricted during your workouts with these diamond-cut technical leggings from Brilliantly British. They have unique diagonal mesh paneling on the front of the thigh and the shin area to allow freedom of movement and comfort, particularly when bending, squatting and cycling. They also provide extra ventilation and look pretty cool, too! £69.99, [brilliantlybritish.com](http://brilliantlybritish.com).



## At one with your body

If you're looking to get on top of your fitness this year, Smart Scales could help. They measure your muscle mass, water ratio, body fat, bone density and BMI, then send the details directly to a free app on your phone so you can track your fitness progress, monitor changes and alter your routine as needed. £109.99, [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk).



# DANCE *to the beat*

If you've been inspired by *Strictly Come Dancing* to take to the dance floor, try one of these fun and expressive styles and shimmy yourself fit into 2016.

1

## BURN CALORIES WITH BOLLYWOOD

If you've ever seen Bollywood dancing on the big screen, the chances are you'll have been mesmerised by the energy, vibrant colours and traditional music. Bollywood dancing originates from the Hindi film industry, but it was the Indian folk dancing to traditional bhangra music that first set the foundation of the dance we know today. Over the years Bollywood has evolved thanks to varying influences such as Latin and jazz. 'It's come a long way since the 'screw the light bulb, pat the dog-style movements, and it's now a diverse art of dance styles,' says Bollywood dance expert and founder of Sapnay Dance School in London, Ash Oberoi. 'Bollywood is a total-body workout.'

It's fast paced, energetic and can be as intense as you want it to be, making it suitable for all ages. 'I have ladies coming to classes who

are in their 60s and 70s as well as those in their 20s and 30s. They liken it to a natural anti-ageing remedy. There's no cream or ointment more powerful than a fun dance session to help you feel younger! Regular sessions can dramatically increase your cardio fitness and tone all of your body, especially your thighs and arms, as you move around the floor at different levels, moving your arms in expressive poses. It's also a real calorie burner, up to 500 calories during a one-hour session, while the upbeat, bhangra music really gives it the feel-good factor.'

For more information, visit [sapnay.co.uk](http://sapnay.co.uk), and for classes in your area, try [southasiandance.org.uk](http://southasiandance.org.uk).

*Bollywood dance is brilliant for cardio fitness and muscle tone*





Celebrate  
**YOU**

Belly dancing is great for toning and strengthening your body, as well as improving flexibility



3

### 3 TONE YOUR CORE WITH BELLY DANCING

This ancient form of dance originated in the Middle East and has evolved enormously over the years, taking on different influences from across the world. Egypt claims to be the original source. As it's migrated to the West, belly dance has taken influence from some Western dances such as ballroom and ballet to become more of a fusion of styles, all based on the traditional hip-circulating movements.

'Belly dance is a natural form of exercise that requires you to work with and be at one with your body,' explains belly dance expert, Fleur Estelle. 'The movements help to lengthen and strengthen your muscles, particularly around your core as they're stretched and manipulated through the different twists and turns of your hips.'

'Although the key areas for belly dance are your obliques, core and

glutes, there are a plethora of moves incorporating arms, shoulders and chest, too. Most of the movements are done while you are grounded to the same spot, making it very low impact, so it's perfect for all ages. Because some moves are slow and controlled with your weight on one foot, it also helps to hone your balance.

'Beyond the physical benefits, belly dancing makes you feel more confident in yourself and your body. You don't have to be 21 with a washboard stomach to take part. Curvier women often look more sensual. When you feel at home in your body you create self-esteem, which is a hugely powerful thing.'

Fleur runs London's largest belly dance school. For more information, visit [fleurestelle.com](http://fleurestelle.com), or to find classes in your area, try a Google search or visit [mosaicdance.org](http://mosaicdance.org).

2

### 2 WORK YOUR LEGS IN THE BALLROOM

Ballroom dancing consists of just five dances – waltz, tango, foxtrot, quickstep and Viennese waltz. It came into its own in the early 1900s and continued to grow through the 30s, 40s and 50s. It lost popularity in the 60s and 70s due to the rise in disco styles but is now enjoying a resurgence thanks to TV programmes such as *Strictly Come Dancing*.

'For me, dance is a fun way of getting fit without having goals or targets,' says ballroom expert Jenni Kravitz from London. 'It doesn't feel as though you're pushing yourself too hard, yet you gain multiple health benefits such as improved cardio fitness and strengthened muscles. It really works your legs, particularly your calves and ankles, more so than other styles of dancing, due to lots of rising up onto your toes and extending your legs as you glide across the room. You also have to maintain good posture and be able to hold your frame. The best way to do this is by engaging your core – it's a key area in most dances but particularly ballroom. I'm in my 60s but people say I look much younger, which I put down to dancing. My shoulders are always back and down so I have great posture.'

Visit [simplydancingpartners.co.uk](http://simplydancingpartners.co.uk) for more on Jenni's classes, or for classes across the UK, visit [dancesport.uk.com](http://dancesport.uk.com).



### Mental health benefits

As well as the many physical benefits, all styles of dance offer fantastic psychological gains, too. The release of endorphins ('feel-good' chemicals) through physical activity helps boost confidence and happiness by triggering a 'euphoric' feeling in your brain.

Learning different dance moves, remembering steps and being at one with the music all helps you to live in the moment, providing an escape from worries and keeping your brain sharp and active. Joining a regular class provides many other benefits, from helping you beat stress to meeting and socialising with new friends.

WORDS: LARISSA CHAPMAN. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK.

# MASTER THE MOVE

## WARRIOR POSE II

Celebrate your inner strength with this grounding yoga pose. Jo Ann Staugaard-Jones shows you how.

**P**ERFECTING YOGA'S impressive-looking standing poses can be a great confidence booster. The archetypal and well-known warrior

stance is an easy yet effective place to start. If done correctly, with awareness and enthusiasm, this powerful posture can balance both body and mind.

In particular, warrior II (Virabhadrasana II) – there are three poses in all – helps you feel open, brave and full of energy. You can feel the strength of your legs, the length of your spine and the breadth across your chest and out to your hands. Effectively, you're harnessing energy from the ground, as power ascends from the earth, through your body and out into the universe. It encourages a sense of inner and outer illumination, as well as peace and contentment.

Physical benefits of warrior II include better physical alignment and balance, and an improvement in strength and flexibility in your legs, ankles and hips.

The level of difficulty of any posture is often determined by the length of time it is held: the longer you hold it, the more of a challenge it is. Staying in poses longer means you can build your strength as well as your spiritual awareness. Build up to holding

the pose for one minute, then over a couple of weeks try to gradually increase to three minutes. Come out of the pose slowly and at any time if you experience pain in your knees, shoulders or hips.

### How to get into the pose

Stand in mountain pose (Tadasana) at the front of the mat, feet together, spine tall, with your hands on your hips. Step one leg back around 3-4 feet behind you on an inhale, putting your foot at a 90-degree angle to the front of the mat, front heel in line with the middle of your back foot's arch. Exhale as you bend your front knee over your ankle, but not forward of it. If you look down, you should still be able to see your big toe. Inhale and extend your arms out to the sides, palms down.

As you next exhale, lift your pelvic floor slightly and engage your core

abdominal muscles to protect your lower back. Hold the position for at least one minute at first, then step the back foot in and return to Tadasana. Repeat on the other side.

Warrior pose  
increases  
stamina and  
helps you feel  
confident.

### Foot placement

As with all standing poses, your feet are your foundation. Care must be taken to place the weight of your body across the full foot and evenly in both of them, centering your torso. Spread your toes wide and distribute your weight equally through the inner and outer edges of your feet, feeling the connection to the floor with your big and little toes.

#### Jo Ann Staugaard-Jones

is a former professor of kinesiology, exercise science and dance, and the author of *The Concise Book of Yoga Anatomy* (Lotus Publishing). Contact her through [move-live.com](http://move-live.com).





## Arm and shoulder alignment

Reach both hands wide, feeling energy flowing along your arms to the tips of your fingers. Roll your shoulders back from your chest and down, feeling the gentle stretch under your armpit and your shoulder blades pulling down toward your waist. Both arms should be parallel to the floor and in a straight line. Look forward over your front

middle finger with a strong focus – in Sanskrit this is called Drishti. Often, the back arm will be further forward than you think, so do the pose in front of a mirror with your front arm pointing towards it. If you can see your back arm, it's too far forward.

## Hip opening

Your hips will be facing the long edge of the mat. Your front hip is flexed and outwardly rotated. This works the deep external rotator muscles in your buttock to stop your leg from rolling inward. It also strengthens your hip flexors on your front thigh, especially the long muscle, called the sartorius, that runs from your front hip bone diagonally across your thigh to the outside of your knee, as it also rotates outward. Most people's hips are quite tight, due to the fact we sit down for so long, but if you have enough strength and stability through your legs and feet, you will eventually feel your pelvis relax and open more.

## Leg positioning

Engage the thigh muscles in your back leg. Your back knee is straight but not over-extended, i.e. locked out, as your quadriceps are taking the load.

**NEXT MONTH:**  
Master the squat  
to blitz fat and  
firm your  
buttocks.

Feel the energy flowing along  
your arms to your fingertips.

Lengthen your lumbar spine  
and drop your tailbone to  
engage your core.

Keep your weight spread  
evenly through both feet.





# *Your winter running* REBOOT

If your trainers have been gathering dust for the past few months, these motivational tips will get you back on course for a happier, healthier year ahead.

**T**HERE'S NO better time than January for fresh beginnings and to breathe new life into your exercise regime.

It might be cold out, but that's all the more reason to incorporate running into your fitness plan.

Running is an effective natural way to get a daily dose of your biological 'happy chemicals', endorphins, which are released by your brain when you exercise. 'They ease the stress created by life's

everyday demands and lift your mood,' says GP and keen runner Dr Juliet McGrattan. This is particularly important during the colder, darker months, when lower levels of sunlight mean we produce less serotonin-boosting vitamin D. 'A quick jog round the park is an ideal way to preserve your mental health,' adds Dr McGrattan. 'Women at my running club tell me that laughing with friends while running gives them an even bigger boost of euphoria.'

It's also a powerful tool for ▶

ensuring you have a longer life. 'Regular running can make a significant difference when it comes to age-related illness. It can reduce your risk of developing breast cancer by 20 per cent and bowel cancer by 30 per cent,' says Juliet. 'Using running to keep to a healthy weight can reduce your risk of endometrial (womb) cancer too.'

Even if you haven't run since your school days, there are simple steps you can take to get into the habit, and learn to love it. If you develop this passion in January, rest assured that as the year progresses and the weather improves, your energy levels will follow suit – just in time for spring and summer fun runs and races!

### Rewire your thoughts

It's a familiar process for many of us. Our kit is on hand, an hour's been set aside, but then negative thoughts creep in to demotivate and discourage us from going out on a run. Dr Rhonda Cohen, a sport and exercise psychologist at Middlesex University, suggests using memories, including visual, auditory and physical, as a combative strategy. When you become aware of negative thoughts, turn to these clues to find motivation.

First, see it. 'This could be a photo or something that shows the end results of your goal, such as a picture of you when you used to run more, or with your kids at a race. Make this clue the wallpaper on your phone, put it on your fridge and on your desk at work,' says Dr Cohen.

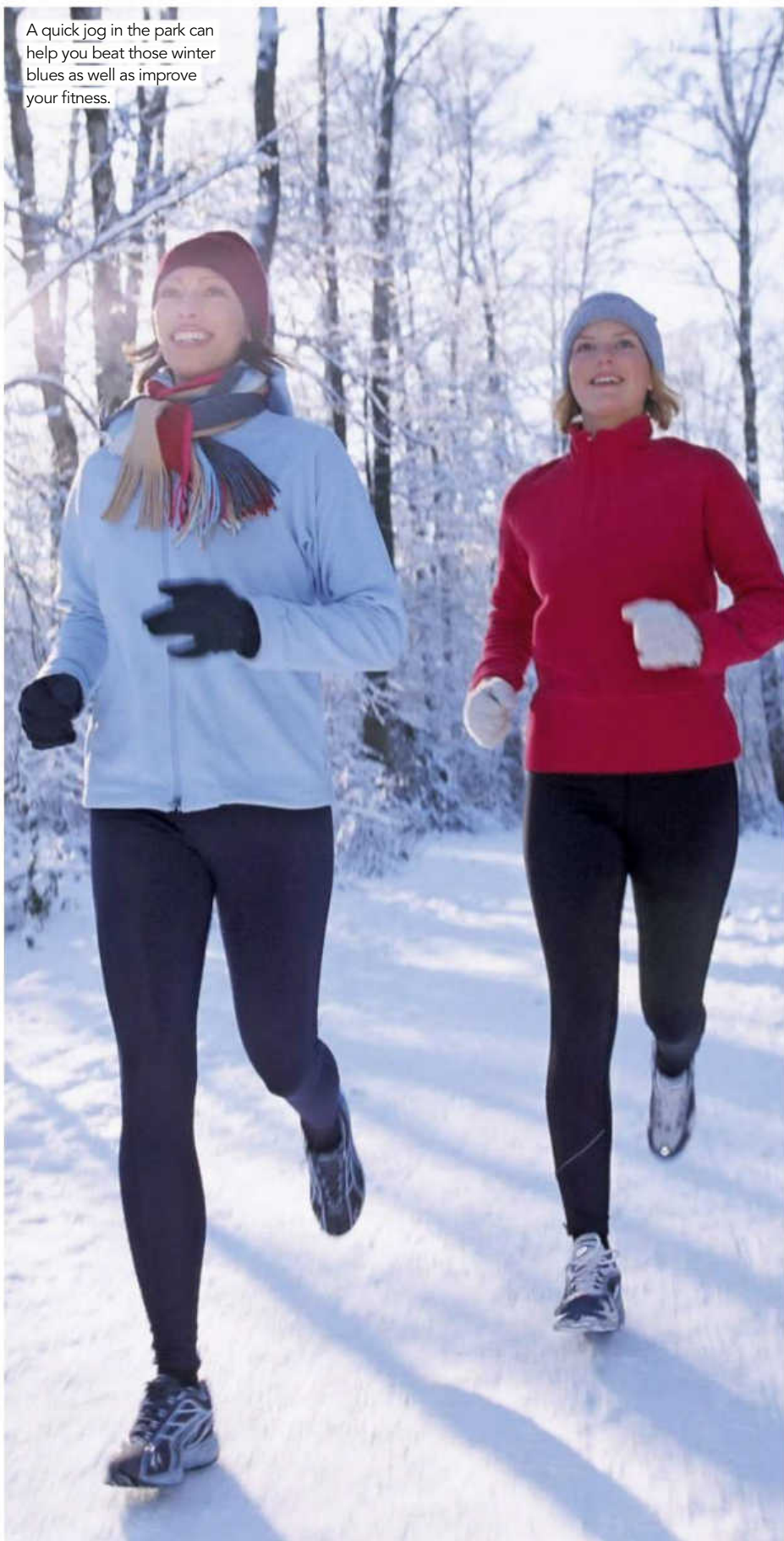
Next, hear it. Record a voice message from yourself, your partner or a family member saying something motivational or pride boosting. 'Listen to this when you need to remember why it is you want to run, and how good it makes you feel,' says Dr Cohen.

Finally, feel it. Touch a physical sign, such as a keepsake from last year's race, pinned to your fridge or kept in your bag. 'Feel the object and remember the kinesthetic experience,' says Dr Cohen. If your event is upcoming, keep the race information to hand. Look at it whenever you need some motivation, envisaging the successful finish.

### Give your body an MOT

There's nothing like treating yourself to a new bit of kit, such as a bright new pair of trainers, to inspire your running. But it's vital to get the correct shoes and support for your individual gait, as this will ensure you run in comfort and avoid injuries. Visit a specialist running shop for a running MOT, where they will look for signs of irregular wear on your current trainers that could denote a problem. For example, increased wear on the inside sole may indicate that you pronate (your foot rolls excessively inwards). Postural rehabilitation specialist Mitchell Phillips works for one such

A quick jog in the park can help you beat those winter blues as well as improve your fitness.





running shop, StrideUK. 'We will find where the imbalance is that is causing the wear, and give you exercises to strengthen the area,' he says.

If you imagine your body as nothing more than a series of levers working together to create movement, your feet are at the end of this chain of levers – the kinetic chain. 'Problems very rarely stem from your feet up,' says Mitchell. 'Your feet just go where they are directed. We look at your core (back and abdominal muscles) and hips to see if you have imbalances in these areas.'

'The MOT allows runners to confidently and safely begin their training, especially if they have stopped running over the Christmas period, or are planning to increase their distance or frequency. Our research has shown that many people start running in the new year, overdo their efforts and end up injured, so we want to prevent this,' says Mitchell. 'It's much cheaper than paying for a course of physiotherapy if you are overzealous and get an injury four weeks down the line!'

## Try a parkrun

While there is a plethora of novelty or far-flung places to run, sometimes the event to get you motivated could be right on your doorstep. Parkruns are 5k runs held in parkland across the UK at 9am every Saturday. It's one of the world's greatest running success stories, and what's more, it's free!

'There are all levels of ability and with parkruns being regular, you have the advantage of quickly seeing your progress,' says Gary Heather, event director of the Lee-On-Solent parkrun. 'There are no time limits and there is always a tail runner (an assigned person that stays at the back to ensure everyone is accounted for), so if you prefer to walk some of the distance, you will always have company.'

You don't need to book; just turn up when you feel ready. As it's a weekly event, you might end up forging new friendships too.

## Go back to school

The more knowledge you gain about a hobby, the more your passion develops. So why not enrol at The Running School, which has centres throughout the UK, to swot up on your technique and keep you motivated? 'More than a third of the runners we coach are women wanting to run faster and more efficiently,' says school founder, Mike Antoniadis. The most common issue runners come to learn more about is arm movement. 'The arms are very important to the running motion, as they provide rhythm and coordination,' says Mike. 'Many of us swing them from side to side and they come across the midline of the body.' This can cause a rotational movement at the shoulders and midline as well as inefficiencies such as crossing over your feet.

Your arms should be bent at the elbow at about 90 degrees or less, and the movement needs to push your elbow back and allow it to swing

forward. 'Keep your fingers closed but relaxed – imagine you're holding a butterfly! Your hand needs to move back to your hip and up no higher than chin level,' says Mike.

The Running School offers six-session courses, where you're given before and after clips of your style. Expect to get homework each week too, as it takes repetition to make new movements habitual. 'Changing your technique requires practise and concentration,' says Mike. 'We advise runners to practise their new technique for 30 seconds at a time, alternating it with walking or running, doing at least three 30-minute practice sessions a week.'

## Improve your strength

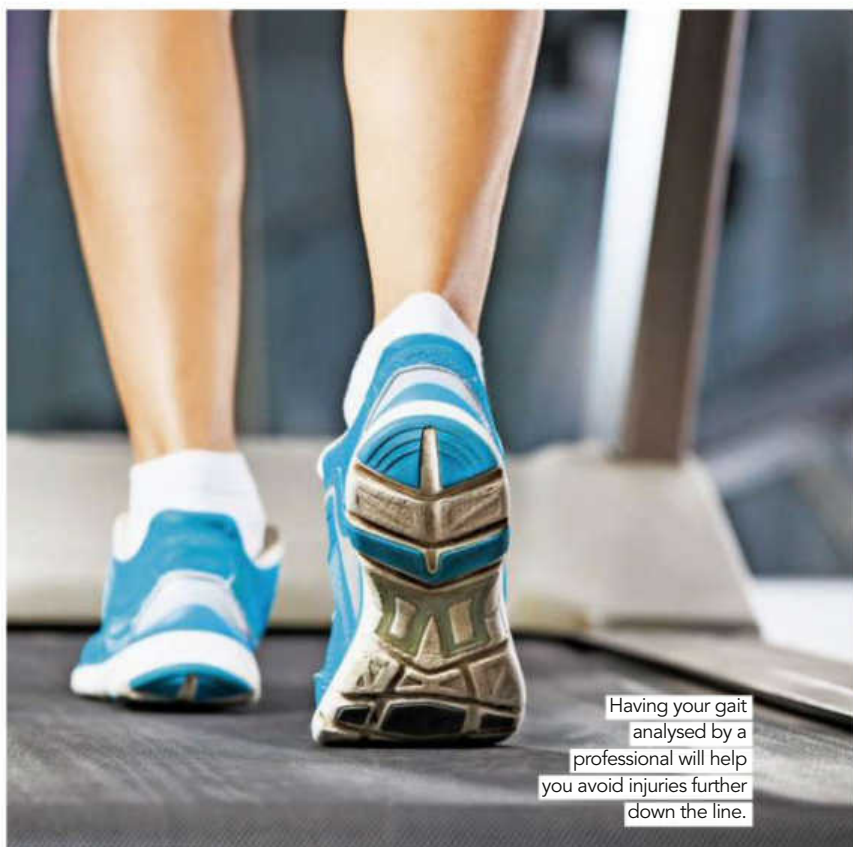
Whether you start running once a week, or every lunchtime, incorporate some strength and conditioning exercises into your routine. 'This improves your efficiency and reduces the likelihood of picking up an injury,' says Richard Blagrove, a strength and conditioning coach at St Mary's University, and author of *Strength and Conditioning for Endurance Runners* (The Crowood Press). Niggling pains or injury can significantly stall new running regimes, so keep your body primed so you're not demotivated by setbacks.

Strength-training exercises should target the movement patterns that are responsible for propelling you forward ▶

*A running MOT will identify any muscular imbalances and help you run more efficiently*



An example of a StrideUK running MOT.



Having your gait analysed by a professional will help you avoid injuries further down the line.

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Lunges build power in the muscles around your hips, helping you become a more efficient runner.



when you run. 'Glute bridges – where you keep your head, shoulders and feet on the ground then raise your hips – plus step-ups and lunges all build power in the muscles around your hips,' says Richard. 'Jumping and hopping also help you develop more rapid strength and elasticity, which will make you a more efficient runner.'

Conditioning exercises should target areas of the body that are vulnerable to injury. Calf raises, side planks and leg raises build robustness around the ankle and trunk in particular. 'These exercises can be performed at home using only your bodyweight for resistance,' says Richard.

Most importantly, strength and conditioning doesn't need to be time consuming. 'Try to complete a mini circuit of 3-5 bodyweight exercises after your running sessions, a few times each week,' says Richard. 'Start by performing 12 repetitions – or 30 seconds – of each exercise, twice in a row.' Over a few weeks, you can build up the number of circuits to five rounds.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

StrideUK – [strideuk.com](http://strideuk.com).  
Dr Juliet McGrattan – [drjulietmcgrattan.com](http://drjulietmcgrattan.com).  
The Running School – [therunningschool.co.uk](http://therunningschool.co.uk).  
Parkrun – [parkrun.org.uk](http://parkrun.org.uk).

## Inject fun back into your run

Whether you're a seasoned runner or relative newbie, it can be easy to get stuck in a training comfort zone. But, lots of new running events involve added fun factor, so you can get fit and have a laugh at the same time.

'Events such as the Glow in the Park night series ([glowinthepark.co.uk](http://glowinthepark.co.uk)) are very different to a normal running race,' says event director Andy Blow. 'They are completely non-competitive, so there are no nerves on the start line. Everyone can relax and enjoy participating – it's more like going to a running party with your friends. And many people dress up for the occasion!'

See if any of these other early 2016 events take your fancy...

### ● ROUGH 'N' TUMBLE 10

Over hills and through copses, good off-road trainers are a must for this event! Cake awaits at the end though. 10 Jan, Wiltshire, [grassrootsevents.co.uk](http://grassrootsevents.co.uk).

### ● RUN FOR CHOCOLATE

A 5-mile run with unlimited hot

chocolate as a reward. 16 Jan, London; 30 Jan, Bristol; 14 Feb, Bournemouth; 20 Feb, Windsor; 27 Feb, Oxford; 5 March, Reading, [runforchocolate.co.uk](http://runforchocolate.co.uk).

### ● RUBIX CHILLY HILLY

Enjoy a bowl of rice and chilli at the end of this 10k cross country run. 31 Jan, Hampshire, [pjc.org.uk](http://pjc.org.uk).

### ● CANCER RESEARCH UK 10KM MANCHESTER WINTER RUN

You're encouraged to wear fancy dress and raise money for the cause. 28 Feb, Manchester, [winterrunseries.co.uk](http://winterrunseries.co.uk).

### ● THE MIGHTY DEERSTALKER

Tweed is the fancy dress of choice for this race, featuring hills, mud, swamp, darkness, rivers and other obstacles, plus live music and ale at the end. 12 March, Innerleithen, Scotland, [mightydeerstalker.com](http://mightydeerstalker.com).

### ● COLOUR ME RAD 5K

Run through clouds of coloured powder for a bright and beautiful experience. May, London, [colormerad.co.uk](http://colormerad.co.uk).

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**OLAY**  
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# BEAUTY

Your new products to enhance eyes, cleanse hair and smooth skin.



## No time for a hair wash? No problem!

Dry shampoo is the ultimate hair SOS when there's no time to wash it, preserving your blow dry, boosting volume and giving that stylishly undone tousle. Now, there are two new eco-conscious versions in soft, squeezable bottles, avoiding the need for aerosols. Aveda Shampure Dry Shampoo, £22 (below), is a super-fine mist that leaves hair heavenly scented with the brand's signature

Shampure aroma of more than 20 flower and plant extracts including organic lavender and ylang-ylang. Meanwhile, the 100 per cent natural ingredients in Rahua Voluminous Dry Shampoo, £28.75, are reassuringly few. Its light texture builds 'oomph' and, best of all, it has a nuzzle-worthy vanilla scent.



## Naturally beautiful peepers

We love Ilia's new eye shadow sticks and liners in six must-have shades from beingcontent.com. Formulated from plant waxes and oils, such as coconut, rosehip, avocado and beeswax, to protect delicate skin, Ilia Beauty Silken Shadow Sticks, £23, give a light metallic wash of colour, while Ilia Pure Eyeliner, £20, glides on smoothly and blends easily.



## Go on, spoil yourself

Envelop your body with sweetly-scented Melvita L'Or Bio Extraordinary Oil, £29. Its blend of exotic oils, used from top to toe, helps to nourish your skin and protect against the cold, drying weather. We love the no-fuss spray application and the easily absorbed, super-light texture.



## Body love

Keep your skin satiny smooth this winter by exfoliating twice a week. This Spa of the World Dead Sea Salt Scrub, £20, blends coarse mineral salt crystals with mango and sunflower seed oils to help invigorate your circulation and buff away dead skin to leave your limbs soft. They'll also smell ever-so slightly of rose – gorgeous!



## World wisdom JADE: A BEAUTY GEM

This green stone was revered in ancient China for its purity, indestructibility and protecting properties, and it's thought women of elite families used it to massage their faces to enhance their complexions. Rich in calcium, magnesium, sodium and aluminium, jade has the ability to retain heat and conduct energy, and can be used as a massage tool to stimulate and heal the skin. The coolness of the Ying Yu Jade Eye Roller, £28, peps up sleepy eyes, eases puffiness and dark circles, and is said to help eye cream to absorb more easily after use.





# Feel gorgeous from within

How you look isn't just down to make-up and skincare – it can often be influenced by your internal attitude, level of gratitude and appreciation for yourself and life.

**I**F ANYONE INSPIRES US TO to embrace our individuality, play to our strengths and have confidence in the way we look, it's American style icon, Iris Apfel. Aged 90, she became one of MAC's faces, appearing in its ads as an elegant, exotic bird of paradise in siren-red lipstick, with peacock green eye shadow behind her trademark owl frame glasses, wearing a magpie collection of bangles and oversized earrings, and with her silver hair immaculately cut and coiffed. She looks like a fascinating woman with wonderful stories to tell. That's what you notice when you see her. Not her wrinkles, which, incidentally, are unretouched and never Botoxed. She is often quoted as saying, 'I don't see anything so wrong with a wrinkle. It's kind of a badge of courage'.

The truth is, we all have our own unique kind of beauty. There's no point in trying to be an English rose if you are born a hardy, colourful chrysanthemum. Roses are celebrated for their precious luxury, but are only at their best for a

short time. Chrysanthemums, on the other hand, burst with colour, energy and strength, lasting long after the roses have wilted. As Iris pithily notes in the recent documentary film about her life *Iris*, 'I found that all the pretty girls I went to high school with came to middle age as frumps, because they just got by with their pretty faces, so they never developed anything. They never learned how to be interesting'.

## Reveal your inner radiance

It does make sense that whether or not you are blessed with model-worthy cheekbones, a mane of thick, glossy hair or an innate sense of style à la Iris, you need to dig deep beyond superficial appearance if you want to age gracefully. Applying a flash of cherry red lipstick, or having a sleek salon blow dry can help you to face the day and feel more confident in your own skin – even to be the most successful, brave and daring version of yourself. But, these are temporary confidence boosters. If you place too much emphasis on them, you risk falling into the trap of thinking beauty equals success, happiness and

the 'perfect' life. It's better to think holistically, because how you feel about yourself inside can affect how you look.

Candace Pert, the late US neuropharmacologist, put it brilliantly in her best-selling book *Molecules of Emotion* (Scribner) when she wrote, 'A feeling sparked in our mind or body will translate as a peptide [cell protein] being released somewhere. This means emotional memory is stored in the body not just or even primarily in the brain... Your body is your subconscious mind. I think unexpressed emotions are literally lodged in the body'.

When we're used to thinking from the outside in, reading that our emotions are held on a cellular level is deep stuff. But it makes sense that anything you feel will show on your face, even if you think you are hiding your emotions. When you are stressed, anxious, upset or tired, a cascade of hormones will show up as tension, making you look pale, drawn and you may even develop a frown. Yet, there are so many little things you can do right now in your daily beauty routine that will make a big difference to how you feel, revealing an inner radiance that shines beyond the surface.

## De-stress to look better

'It can be as simple as taking a deep breath,' says Marie Reynolds, a massage and beauty therapist, who specialises in Bowen Technique (a subtle form of body



*'I don't see anything so wrong with a wrinkle. It's kind of a badge of courage.'*

Iris Apfel,  
style icon





WORDS: CATHERINE TURNER. PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK, REX FEATURES.

manipulation). 'Clients often arrive for a treatment overwhelmed by negative emotions, which show as tension lines on their faces. The first things I ask them to do is slow down and use the following breathing technique. Visualise the in-breath as a cleansing wash for your whole body, right down to the deep tissues and cells. See the out-breath as a light grey smoke leaving your body, taking away toxins and everything you don't need. This instantly balances your nervous system. When you are stressed, anxious or worried, you are in 'fight or flight' mode, which sends a cascade of hormones into your body that can lead to the skin looking dull and sallow. Free radicals are produced, which can attack collagen – skin's plumping protein – leading to premature ageing.'

Coming back to the breath, however, encourages the 'rest and digest' side of the nervous system to kick in, also known as the parasympathetic nervous

system. Your whole body and mind slows down, tension melts, lines ease and you instantly start to look more relaxed. This is why you look better after a facial, massage or good night's sleep.

### See yourself differently

Once you learn to connect with your breath, you can then go a bit deeper and begin to think differently about yourself. Wellness practitioner Katie Light uses visualisation and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) to help her clients look and feel their best. She suggests doing the following: 'Close your eyes and start thinking about what inner beauty is like for you. Ask yourself, what does it look, feel and sound like? What things do you associate with it? Do any pictures, objects or words come up for you? If so, draw them or cut out images from a magazine to represent them.'

Katie says it doesn't matter how random or silly it seems – it might be

a smile, the sun, a colour or a word – it's just so you can build a picture for yourself. 'Spend time creating a mood board for what inner beauty represents to you. Look at it daily and say the words out loud so they become real. This is a great way to encourage new, positive thoughts.'

How often do you avoid mirrors, or cringe when you see your reflection in a shop window? You can turn this negative habit into a way of appreciating and learning to love yourself instead. It goes beyond vanity – think of the famous quote from the Buddha, 'You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection'.

And when it comes to self-love, there can be no better example than the founder of self-development publisher Hay House, Louise Hay. Not only does she encourage positive thinking, but she also takes it a step further by encouraging you to look into the mirror

as you say positive things to yourself – she even has a heart-shaped mirror to practice with. In one of her mirroring tutorials, she advises, ‘Take a look at what you see in the mirror. Breathe, say your name and then add, “I really love you. I really, really love you”’. The idea is to connect with your inner child. So often we criticise, make fun of or say derogatory things to ourselves and it becomes a habit. Louise advocates connecting to that inner child who wants so much to be loved.

According to Louise, if this is too tough to start with, say, ‘I am willing to learn to like you’, which is not quite as threatening. Do it a lot. ‘First thing in the morning, take out a mirror and say something nice to yourself. Try, “You look fabulous. You look fantastic!”’, she says. Doing this might seem cringe-worthy at first, but if you persist, it will work on a deeper level as it helps you develop a better relationship with yourself and your looks.

### Harness gratitude

Another similar celebration of self is to practice gratitude. ‘It is something we often miss, but is such an easy, everyday process,’ says Katie. ‘It creates an open door for more beautiful things, people and situations to come into your life. Remember, looking good on the outside is a result of peacefulness and

acceptance on the inside.’

So, write down five things to be grateful for now about your body and face. It can be anything that helps you feel more positive about who you are now, from ‘I am grateful for thick, healthy hair’, to ‘I have clear blue eyes’ or ‘I have a small waist’.

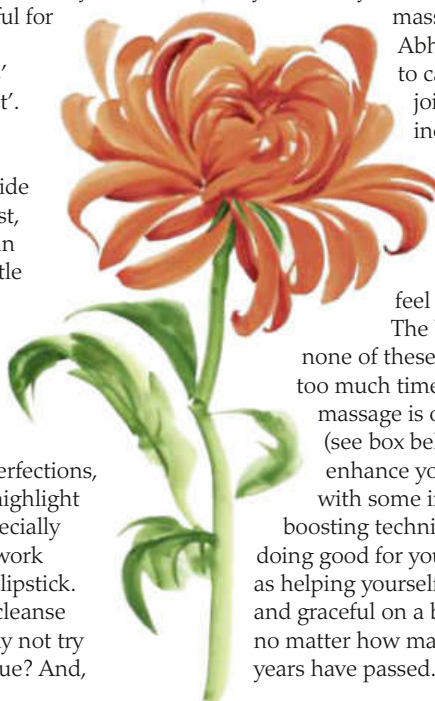
### Treat yourself

As much as they provide a self-confidence boost, the above exercises can also help make the little beautifying rituals throughout your day a more uplifting experience. Rather than using make-up to cover up or hide so-called imperfections, you instead use it to highlight your good points, especially if you use the mirror work when you apply your lipstick. Similarly, before you cleanse your skin at night, why not try the breathing technique? And,

instead of thinking of massage as a special spa treat, do it every day, giving thanks for your healthy body as you do so. In the Indian healing and healthcare system of Ayurveda, daily self-

massage, known as Abhyanga, is believed to calm nerves, oil the joints, tone muscles, increase energy by day and encourage better sleep by night, as well as making skin look, feel and smell great.

The beauty is that none of these things take up too much time – even the massage is only 5-10 minutes (see box below). So why not enhance your daily routine with some inner-beauty boosting techniques? You’ll be doing good for your mind as well as helping yourself stay youthful and graceful on a biological level no matter how many chronological years have passed.



There’s no point in trying to be an English rose if you are born a hardy, colourful chrysanthemum.

## TRY BEAUTIFYING SELF-MASSAGE

**This top-to-toe massage is based on the Ayurvedic approach and is usually done before a bath or shower, but you can do it afterwards, missing out the hair and scalp massage if you need to.**

- 1** Preheat your oil (see right for suggestions) by standing the bottle in hot water, or simply warming the oil in your hands.
- 2** Take a generous amount of oil into your palms, rub your hands together and begin. Start at your feet and use your fingers to manipulate the toe joints, working around the soles of your feet with your thumbs in circular movements.
- 3** Use longer strokes to work your way up your legs, gently kneading your buttocks and moving around your belly in a

clockwise, circular movement.

**4** Massage your fingers and hands, again working the joints, then stroke along your arms towards your chest and heart.

**5** Finish by working the oil into your scalp, hair and face (make sure the oil you use is suitable for the face). Either allow the oil to soak in overnight (pop on some old pyjamas to avoid staining) or rinse off in the shower or bath.

### OUR FAVOURITE OILS

Those we recommend using in combination with this massage include Balance Me Radiance Face Oil, £30. It contains a cocktail of

skin-boosting oils including camellia seed, which is full of antioxidants to boost skin’s own healing mechanisms. De Mamiel Salvation Body Oil, £70, is hand-blended using the highest-quality plant oils such as prickly pear and coconut, and is rich in essential fatty acids to nourish skin, plus perfume-grade essential oils frankincense, bergamot, myrrh and jasmine, which give it a heavenly, soul-affirming aroma. Maui Spirited Body Oil, £44, has sweet almond

and jojoba as easily absorbed base oils to hydrate skin, plus essential oils such as bergamot, lemongrass, lavender, lime and spearmint to uplift mood and invigorate circulation.





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# BEAUTY TOOLKIT

## KISSABLE LIPS

Get smoother, fuller lips in this season's statement red and plum tones, so you'll look ravishing at festive parties and get-togethers.

**1 Smooth fine lines** Keep the delicate skin around your mouth looking younger with a light layer of Weleda Evening Primrose Age Revitalising Eye and Lip Cream, £23.95. Apply around your lip line daily. While it won't erase fine lines, it will tighten lip contours and make skin look smoother.

**2 Banish flakiness** Dry or flaky lips can appear more dehydrated and thinner than they actually are. Use a lip scrub such as Lush Mint Julips Lip Scrub, £5.50, for a targeted exfoliation treatment. The sugar crystals gently slough away rough, dead skin for a smooth, minty afterglow.

**3 Ramp up hydration** Ensuring your lips are moisturised is the secret to a smooth, fuller-looking pout. Lanolips 101 Ointment in Cranberry, £7.99, includes medical-grade lanolin to lock in moisture, vitamin E, and antioxidant-rich cranberry fruit extract for a fruity, festive twist.

**4 Use a multitasker** Think of Tata Harper Be True Lip Treatment, £22, as a facial for your lips. The bioactive, 100 per cent natural stick includes wheat extract to plump fine lines, date palm to boost collagen synthesis, and a soothing combination of rhubarb, acai and green tea oils to help battle the winter elements.

**5 Plump your pout** Boost your lips with nature's Botox: bee venom. Manuka Doctor ApiRefine Lip Enhancer, £14.99, visibly enhances lip volume in less than five minutes using an advanced form of hyaluronic acid. Bee venom and manuka honey encourage collagen formation while peppermint adds an invigorating tingle.

**6 Make an impact** Creamy lipsticks in pigmented colours won't dry out your pout like some matte formulations. Organic Glam Lipstick in Red, £19.95, is the ultimate festive shade. Infused with shea butter, castor oil, green tea and grapeseed, the rich red formulation nourishes your lips.

**7 Outline and define** Dark, daring colours need a liner to prevent feathering and bleeding. Aveda Nourish-Mint Lip Liner in Purple Sage, £15, is perfect for outlining deep, blackberry tones. Made of plant waxes and fruit butters, it gives a soft, creamy consistency.

**8 Go glossy** If bold lips aren't for you, or you want glossy red lips, try high-shine Origins Drink Up Hydrating Lip Balm in Plum Punch, £16.50. It contains apricot kernel and jojoba oils to soothe parched lips, while mineral pigments deliver subtle colour.

# SMOOTH OPERATOR

Fed up with shaving bumps or enduring painful waxing? Achieving a smooth, hair-free body has never been easier. Start now and you'll be swimsuit ready come summer.

**H**AVING HAIR ON your body is completely natural. You may not like it and might undergo various procedures to remove some or even all of it, depending on your preference, but it is there for a reason. Some 5-10 million hairs grow over your entire body, not including your head, with 17,000 or so of them on your legs alone. Your body is meant to be covered with short, fine hairs, known as vellus hair, which are barely noticeable. The only areas you don't have them is your lips, back of ears, palms, soles, navel and some external genital areas.

The reason you have this hair, from an evolutionary perspective, is to enhance your power of touch as the hair follicles brush against things. The hairs also keep you warm in winter, as the follicles stand up on end to thicken the 'thermal layer' between your body

and the elements. This function was, of course, much more important to our ancestors who didn't live in centrally heated homes or have high-tech materials and goose down-filled coats to keep them warm – just animal skins!

The hair most of us want to remove is known as androgenic hair, often referred to as just body hair, which develops and grows during and after puberty. This hair is linked to the level of male hormones you have, one of which is testosterone, hence why men tend to have more body hair than women – yes, it is natural for women to have testosterone, just in smaller quantities. Nowadays, it's become fashionable to remove much of this body hair, or in the least from your legs and under arms, although winter gives you a bit of a reprieve as you can hide under thick tights and woolly jumpers.

## The good, bad and ugly

Removing hair is pretty straight forward if you shave or wax, but both methods are time consuming and can be painful. With shaving, you're more prone to getting ingrown hairs. Hair under your arms or around your groin is coarser, too, making ingrown hairs there even more likely, especially in winter when you're wrapped up in thick clothes and tights and less likely to exfoliate regularly. A build-up of dead skin cells and sebum can clog pores, preventing the hairs growing through. They can end up either growing sideways under your skin, or pushing back into the follicle creating a pimple. What's more, you have to do it pretty much every other day, as the average growth rate of body hair is 1.25cm every 28 days.







When it comes to waxing, although you end up with a nice smooth effect, you first have to endure the pain of having the hairs ripped out, and then look like a plucked chicken for a few hours until the inflammation dies down. Sometimes, the use of soft wax, also called strip wax, can burn sensitive skin, too, as it has to be heated to high temperatures in order to become spreadable. Hard wax, which is applied and allowed to cool and harden before being ripped off without a material strip, is preferable, as it is said to only stick to hairs and not skin as well.

There's also the fact you have to grow the hairs long enough to be waxed out in the first place, which can be a hindrance as you have to plan your outfits around how long your hair is going to be – annoying if you have parties coming up and want to wear a sleeveless dress, for example.

Depilatory creams are also available, but these are perhaps the least natural option, as you're submitting your skin to a cocktail of chemicals designed to dissolve hairs but which can also irritate your skin, especially in sensitive areas.

### No pain and lots to gain

With laser or intense pulsed light (IPL) treatments, side effects can be avoided, as you're killing or slowing hair growth at the root. Not only are the newer treatments virtually painless, some of which you can even do at home, they don't harm your skin and you can carry on shaving between sessions to stay smooth. Over time, you'll experience slower and finer growth, so what does grow through is hardly noticeable. But you do have to space the sessions 6-8 weeks apart at salons, or two weeks at home, though to make sure you target as many hairs as possible. This is because only about 30 per cent of underarm or leg hairs are in the growing phase at any one time, while the remainder are resting or already in the shedding phase. Killing off the hair follicles in this way doesn't do damage to the rest of your body or skin.

In terms of costs, laser and IPL treatments can work out cheaper in the long run than a lifetime spent waxing. The average cost of a full leg wax is £25, meaning that having it done once a month over 50 years (if you start in your 20s and stop in your 60s) would set you back £15,000 – and that's only for one body part. If

the same area was treated with laser, with six initial sessions at around £400, then one top up session per year at £100, that's £5,300, saving you almost £10,000!

Laser hair treatments are considered to be very safe. As such, a patch test is always carried out a few weeks prior to a full treatment, where you'll have a small, indiscreet area of skin tested to make sure you don't react badly. After treatment, the therapist or aesthetician should apply a cooling lotion, and it's advised to use aloe vera on the treated area for a few days and avoid hot showers or saunas for at least 24 hours.

Winter is a perfect time to start, as usually you mustn't expose laser-treated skin to the sun, either in the weeks before or after treatment. This is because your skin will be more sensitive to the sun and more likely to get pigmentation marks, if you are prone to them, or sunburn. Although having laser or IPL can take up to 6-8 months to produce the desired results, if you begin now, you'll be waving goodbye to your razor by summer and saying hello to permanently smooth skin.

### How do they work?

'All laser and IPL devices have the same three key components,' says Dr Shane Hanson, Philips consumer marketing intelligence manager. 'The first is fluence, which is the energy burst required to put hairs to sleep. Think of it

*You can easily  
achieve naturally  
smooth legs in  
time for summer*



## Laser and IPL treatments can work out much cheaper in the long run than a lifetime spent waxing.

as like the message, or greetings card, that you want to send to the roots. Second, to contain that energy, something needs to carry it and direct it to the right place. That's the wavelength, which is like the envelope and address for your card. The third thing is pulse duration – the time it takes for the energy to travel from the device to the hair root, which is like choosing a first or second class stamp.'

With so many treatment options and new home devices on the market, it's worth considering the pros and cons before you decide which is best for you and your purse...

### Laser precision

**HOW DOES IT WORK?** Laser hair removal works by 'cauterising' the hair

growth cells. The laser beam targets the melanin (pigment) in the hair, meaning it doesn't damage the surrounding skin. 'A laser beam is a single wavelength or beam of light. All laser beams travel in a straight line – no diverging, converging or scattering – so they are very powerful,' explains Dr Sabika Karim of Revere Clinics. 'Its target is usually the melanin in the hair shaft within the follicle. The hair absorbs this energy and turns it into heat, which is radiated into the hair-growth cells to destroy them. If there's no hair in the follicle, it can't work, which is why you mustn't pluck, wax or epilate for four weeks beforehand. Instead, shaving leaves an ideal amount of hair under the surface to attract the beam. For best results, hair must be in the growth

phase so that its bulb is in maximum contact with the base of the follicle, rather than being partially disconnected and ready to be shed.'

Traditionally, the biggest challenge was treating black and Asian skin types since the melanin-focused energy could heat and burn the skin, too. Conversely, very blonde or white hair doesn't contain enough melanin for it to work at all. New, more sophisticated machines have solved these problems. Short wavelength lasers are great for pale-to-medium skin types, and now darker Asian and black skins can be treated with longer wavelength lasers.

**SUITABLE FOR:** All skin types. Some machines, such as the Soprano ICE, feature different types of lasers in one device so the right one can be chosen to work on all skins, including suntanned skin. It's ideal for sensitive areas, such as your face and bikini line.

**ADVANTAGES:** The right laser treatment should achieve permanent hair reduction. As a rough guide, if there



are no hormonal imbalances, such as polycystic ovary syndrome caused by excessive levels of androgens, which makes you grow unwanted body hair, then Dr Karim estimates you should be 80-90 per cent clear within six sessions, each spaced six weeks apart. For some people it works faster. It's also pain-free because hair is heated gradually instead of just zapping it with a single pulse, while the ice-cold tip cools the skin.

**DISADVANTAGES:** The shorter and longer wavelengths are more effective but said to be less comfortable than the diode laser, although cooling agents are used to lessen the heat from the laser gun head. However, each burst is over in a few minutes. Also, hair growth is staggered so not all hairs are caught in the growth phase. This means that after the initial course, you'll probably need one top-up every year or two to catch dormant hairs.

#### HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

It's around £160 for one session on the half-leg using Soprano Ice (there are salons nationwide including London, Bournemouth and Birmingham, [courthouseclinics.com](http://courthouseclinics.com)). Often, you can save money by booking a course. True laser machines aren't regulated for home use, so most home laser kits you buy will actually be IPL machines.

## Types of laser machines

**RUBY LASER** This removal method is used in machines such as the RubyStar, EpiPulse Ruby and Palomar E2000. It was one of the first cosmetic laser hair removal systems to be developed and features a unique, cooled sapphire hand piece to conduct heat away from the skin before and after each pulse. It may not be as pain-free as newer machines.

● **Best suited to those with pale skins. Cannot be used on light, white or grey hair.**

**ALEXANDRITE LASER** This is found in machines including EpiTough Plus, Apogee and GentleLASE. This type of laser utilises the red-infrared part of the light spectrum. It offers faster treatment times and results than Ruby Laser but can be more painful. It can also treat very fine and light hair, unlike others.

● **Best suited to very light to olive skin tones. Cannot be used on darker skin tones.**

**DIODE LASER** This type of treatment is used in the Soprano, SLP 100, F1 Diode, MeDioStar, Lightsheer, Laserlite, Apex 800 and Epistar. They differ from the above as they are made up of diodes or semiconductors, which are combined to form the light source. They also produce longer wavelengths to provide deeper penetration, making them effective on darker skin types and thick, coarse hair. However, while it is generally very effective for a variety of people, it has been linked to cases of urticaria – hives that form when histamine is released from under the skin, causing swelling.

● **Best suited to dark skins.**

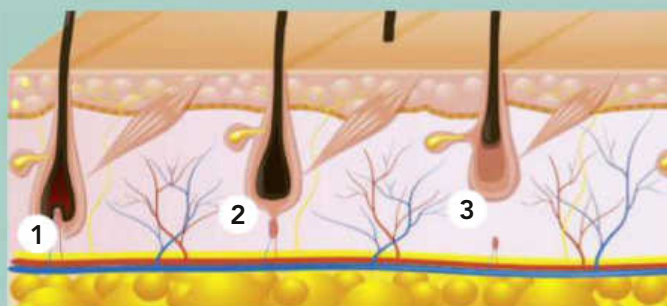
**ND:YAG LASER** This is found in Athos, CoolGlide, Image, Lyra, Medlite IV and VARIA. It works within the infrared area of the light spectrum. It's best suited to treating large areas of skin and is one of the most advanced methods available. Unlike the above, which target the melanin in skin, carbon is the target of this laser because of its strong absorptive properties. A carbon lotion is spread onto skin, which penetrates the hair follicles. The laser then targets the carbon. The drawback is if the carbon doesn't get into the follicles, it won't work as well. Plus, there is a small risk that it might spread out and, when it comes into contact with the laser, create a tattoo-like effect.

● **Suitable for all skin types.**

**Reduction of hair and slower growth rate far exceed that of IPL.**

## How does your hair grow?

Hair growth all over your body comprises of the following three main stages...



**1 Anagen.** This is the growth phase, when cells in the papilla are dividing rapidly to produce new hair fibre. At this point, the follicle is anchored deep into the dermis so it receives nourishment from your blood. In vellus hairs, this stage lasts only 4-8 weeks, but for the hair on your head it can continue for five years or more, depending on your genes.

**2 Catagen.** Following the active growth stage comes a short transition or regression phase when

the hair follicle prepares to renew itself. The hair stops growing as the outer root shrinks at the base, gradually becoming rounder and more club-shaped while it is pushed upward and loses contact with its blood supply. This usually lasts around two weeks.

**3 Telogen.** During this resting phase, the follicle lies dormant for 2-4 months during which the hair breaks away from its root. It is then pushed out and shed by the new hair starting to grow below it.



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## IPL: a flash of inspiration

**HOW DOES IT WORK?** Like laser, IPL energy targets melanin in the hair. 'The main difference between IPL and laser therapy is the light wavelength that carries the energy,' explains Dr Hanson. 'Laser uses one single specific wavelength – think of it as like a laser pointer in a PowerPoint presentation – whereas IPL is like a big flashbulb. IPL emits all the wavelength colours to produce white light instead.'

Although this makes the energy weaker and it doesn't penetrate as deeply, it still discourages the root enough to send it into sleep mode for elongated periods. As with lasering, hair should be shaved beforehand to shorten it, rather than waxed and removed altogether, as the machine works by targeting the hair shaft and damaging the follicle – if there is no hair inside, it has nothing to target. Suntanning should be avoided for four weeks before treatment, as too much melanin can lead to burning. After each session, the hair shaft left in the follicle sheds naturally within 14 days.

**SUITABLE FOR:** Brunettes with fairly light skin, and it can be used on all parts of your body. It is particularly effective on unwanted hair caused by polycystic ovary syndrome. Safety requirements, i.e. the strength of the light used, make domestic machines suited to light-to-medium skin types only.

**ADVANTAGES:** A two-year study by Philips found that four fortnightly treatments produced a 75 per cent hair reduction, while monthly top-ups for one year kept hair in sleep mode continuously with up to 80 per cent reduction. In the second year, with no top-ups, that clearance was maintained.

**DISADVANTAGES:** IPL isn't for everyone. For darker skins, for instance, IPL isn't suitable because the targeted light is attracted to pigment in skin as well as hair, which can lead to burning. Having a suntan or even wearing self-tan can create the same problem. Like laser, IPL won't work on pale blonde or grey hairs since they lack the pigment that attracts the energy in the first place. Despite offering 'long-term' results, IPL isn't usually permanent. However, regrowth is finer and slower. Also, rather than feeling like heat, this is the treatment that in sensitive areas feels like the snap of a rubber band!

**HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?** Prices start at around £140 for the Silk'n Glide 30,000 HPL (home pulsed light). Salon treatments are around £100 per session.

## Lasers on trial

We put the latest laser and IPL treatments to the test.

### REMINGTON i-LIGHT REVEAL IPL, £199.99.

'I found this fairly easy to use, even with one hand. You press the handset firmly into the skin, it beeps to confirm proper contact and you press the button to activate the light. If it's not in the right place, i.e. in full contact, it won't work. You have to lift it to move it to the next patch and you work in rows, trying not to overlap treatment areas. Doing both underarms took 10 minutes. After a second treatment 10 days later, the hair was thinner by about one-third, so I'll definitely carry on.

You feel a tiny snap but, despite using it on the highest setting, it's not that bad. On a scale of one to five I'd measure my overall discomfort at two.'

*Rachael Cunningham, 32, Birmingham.*

### PHILIPS LUMEA PRESTIGE IPL, £500.

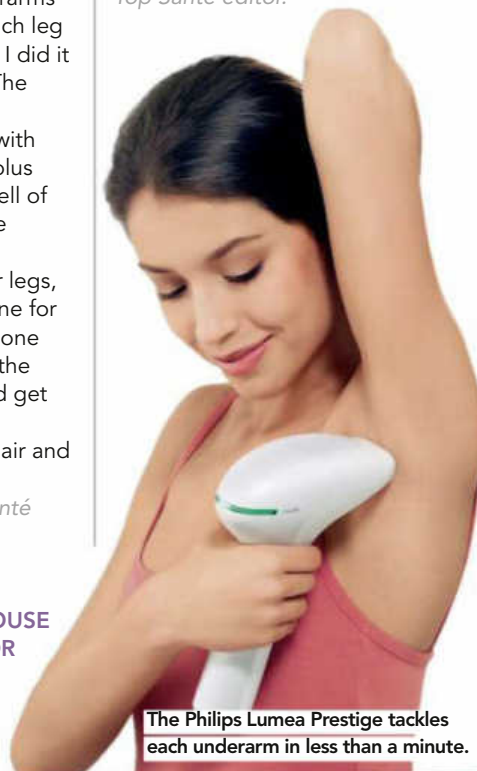
'Using this at home was so convenient, like holding a hairdryer. I tackled my underarms in less than a minute and each leg took about 10 minutes, and I did it while reading a magazine! The pain was much less than I remembered experiencing with previous salon treatments, plus there was no off-putting smell of burning hair. There are three attachments: one for large treatment areas, suitable for legs, one for the bikini line and one for facial hair. I found the facial one useful for my underarms as the small window meant it could get into small angles. After two treatments, I have less leg hair and the hairs are finer.

*Natalie Millman, 39, Top Santé deputy editor.*

### SOPRANO ICE LASER TREATMENT AT COURTHOUSE CLINIC, LONDON, £85 FOR A ONE-OFF UNDERARM TREATMENT. £500 FOR A COURSE OF 8.

'I've tried IPL in the past and although it worked to reduce the hair growth and thickness, it was quite painful. The new Soprano Ice works in a different way, gliding over your skin thanks to a cool gel, so you don't get a concentrated burst of energy in one go. The first session was completely painless – on bikini line and underarms – and over in 20 minutes. The next hurt a tad because I hadn't shaved properly. If there is any hair sticking up above the skin, the laser makes it really hot, so it's best to shave closely the day before, I was advised, so there is only minimal growth. What I love most about the results is that hair growth slows after just one session. After three, not only is growth slower but finer too, so it's a lot less noticeable. Gone are the days when I have a five o'clock shadow under my arms! Another benefit is that you can go on holiday without a razor – a bonus if you're only taking hand luggage.'

*Katy Sunnassee, 37, Top Santé editor.*

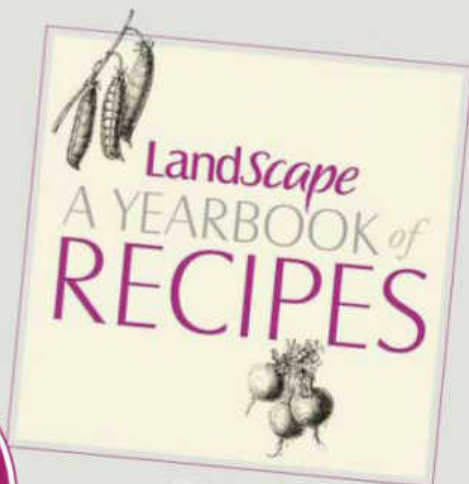


The Philips Lumea Prestige tackles each underarm in less than a minute.

# LandScape

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# MEET THE TOP SANTÉ TEAM...

Come relax with us on an exclusive  
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For a spa break like no other, join the Top Santé team at the award-winning Ragdale Hall Health Hydro and Thermal Spa in Leicestershire from **May 22-24, 2016**. You'll enjoy breakfast in bed, three-course lunch and dinner both days, plus a free room gift (see right).

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*'Treat yourself  
to a relaxing  
spa weekend  
with myself and  
the Top Santé team!'*

Katy Sunnassee, editor



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Ragdale Hall's award-winning Thermal Spa.



TERMS AND CONDITIONS: The offer is subject to availability and does not include travel. Guests at Ragdale Hall must be aged 16 or over. The break is available from 22-24 May 2016.



SPOTLIGHT  
ON...

# Facial ESSENCES

It's the newest beauty breakthrough designed to infuse your skin with goodness. Discover how you could benefit from this Asian-inspired 'pre-treatment'.

**T**HE LATEST SKINCARE TREND TO emerge from East Asia is the use of essences, which are at the heart of most Korean women's skincare routines. 'Facial or treatment essences, also known as cosmetic waters, have a long heritage in Korea,' explains Cammie Cannella of Kiehl's. 'They are customarily used as the first leave-on step in a treatment routine, helping to prime the skin for subsequent products.'

You might assume they're the same as toners, but while both have a similar, runny, water-based formulation, there are differences. Essences don't actually clean the skin or remove leftover make-up residue because there's no alcohol in the formula to remove excess oils. Instead, think of an essence as a 'pre-treatment', which sinks into the top layers of the epidermis after a thorough cleanse, preparing your skin for products with a richer texture, such as your serum, day or night cream. Instead of applying it to a cotton pad and wiping over your face, as you would a toner, you apply the essence with your fingertips, pressing it into your face and neck.

## What's in an essence?

'Scientifically, an essence is the extract from an ingredient that is highest in concentration with none or barely any integration with another ingredient,' says celeb facialist Su-Man, who fuses East Asian and Western philosophies in her famed skin treatments. Most essences contain nourishing ingredients such as hyaluronic acid and glycerin, to leave your skin 'plumped up'. They also contain active ingredients to target specific skin issues – Mizon Pore Refine Silky Essence, £25 ([cultbeauty.co.uk](http://cultbeauty.co.uk)) contains green tea and lotus extract to balance oily areas on a combination T-zone, while Kiehl's Iris Extract Activating Treatment Essence, £36 ([kiehls.co.uk](http://kiehls.co.uk)) contains lipohydroxy acid (LHA) to help gently exfoliate dead skin cells to brighten dull skin.

Although an essence contains active ingredients, the watery texture isn't as powerful as a serum, which you will need to use as well. 'A serum will be your most potent product, since they typically contain silicones, oils or emulsifiers and offer targeted benefits for specific skin attributes,' says Cammie.

Hydrate  
and help  
plump  
your  
skin with  
ingredients  
that  
deeply  
penetrate.





# TRY A MULTI-STEP KOREAN FACIAL

Involving anything from 10-15 different stages, this centuries-old tradition is very different to our quick 'cleanse, tone, mask, moisturise', facials. 'Asian women start thinking about anti-ageing at 18 and rather than waiting for things to go wrong, a layering system is designed for prevention,' explains Su-man. Try a multi-step facial at bedtime when you've got more time and won't be late for work!

**1 Triple-cleanse** Yes you read that right. This really gets your skin clean and ready for layering subsequent products. First, gently massage in an oil-based cleanser to melt away grime and make-up, then emulsify with water and use a washcloth such as Erborian Bamboo Fiber Face Cloth, £8 ([uk.erborian.com](http://uk.erborian.com)) to gently buff the skin, lift dead skin cells and stimulate the circulation. Finally, use a foaming wash to remove all traces of dirt and cleansing oil. Avoid one with sodium laureth sulfate or sodium lauryl sulfate, as these can strip natural oils.

**2 Tone and essence** Next, sweep your skin with a cotton pad soaked in gentle toner to remove any final traces of grime and prep your skin for the essence. Pat on the essence and then sweep and roll it in an upward motion to boost circulation.

**3 Serum and massage** Choose a serum to help with your particular skin concern and really concentrate on massaging it in. 'The thinking behind this is to truly have incredible skin. What lies underneath has to be rejuvenated,' explains Su-man. 'By massaging, you release muscle tension and skin stress, improve blood circulation and lymphatic drainage, and get rid of stagnation.'

**4 Apply a mask** Dot your eye cream on using your ring finger, but instead of your usual night cream, try a sleep mask such as The Body Shop Drops of Youth Bouncy Sleeping Mask, £24 ([thebodyshop.co.uk](http://thebodyshop.co.uk)). Ultra hydrating, these Korean-inspired masks are almost gel-like in texture and create a film across your skin to seal in all the previous layers of products as well as helping to plump and firm your skin as you sleep.



WORDS: SARAH COOPER-WHITE. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK.

## TRIED & TESTED



**LYNSEY SMEDLEY-SAMPSON, 39, EGHAM, SURREY, TRIED SUQQU MOISTURE REPAIR ESSENCE, £85.**

**THE LOWDOWN:** This essence helps to combat the lack of elasticity in ageing skin thanks to intensely hydrating natural ingredients from East Asia, such as shell ginger leaf extract and cork tree bark extract as well as yeast and cherry extracts. These ingredients saturate the skin's outermost layer, increasing its suppleness and softness.  
**THE VERDICT:** As I approach 40, I have noticed more fine lines everywhere. After using this essence, my skin felt instantly smoother and I could see a difference after only two days. It kept my skin soft and plump all day. Initially, I didn't like the thin, watery consistency but my skin seemed to lap it up and even my mum commented that my face looked healthier! A real luxe treat that works!



BLOW THE BUDGET



**FIONA WALLS, 37, LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX, TRIED DHC RESVERATROL ESSENCE, £43.**

**THE LOWDOWN:** A deeply hydrating super booster from a cult Japanese skincare range, which contains resveratrol, a highly potent antioxidant found in the skin of red grapes that improves tissue elasticity, reduces fine lines and supports the skin's natural moisture barrier.  
**THE VERDICT:** It had a pleasant, silky texture that glided on effortlessly and soaked in quickly, meaning I could apply my moisturiser on top almost immediately. It didn't seem to have a scent, which I liked as it meant that it didn't interfere with the fragrance of my moisturiser. The main thing I noticed was that my skin felt and looked really plump and continued to do so throughout the day.



SPLURGE



**LIZ HOOPER, 34, ANDOVER, HAMPSHIRE, TRIED SU-MAN REHYDRATING TONING ESSENCE, £37.**

**THE LOWDOWN:** This product is the perfect bridge between cleansing and moisturising to hydrate and firm the skin, leaving it plump and dewy looking. Hyaluronic acid, rose petal, green tea and honey help to soothe, replenish lost moisture and diminish the signs of ageing.  
**THE VERDICT:** The thin and watery texture took a bit of getting used to and I had to wait a while before applying moisturiser as my skin was wet. It left my face feeling dewy and fresh after use and it didn't sting or feel harsh like some traditional toners can. However, I like a fast and simple regime, so using this product just seemed like an unnecessary step to me, and one I felt I could do without.



SPEND

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The tranquil boutique sanctuary.



The hotel's restaurant La Brasserie.





Worth  
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Treat yourself to an evening of pampering with this gift box and citrus, vanilla and jasmine-scented luxury candle, worth £20 each.

We're giving away 10 sets, which include a Cleansing Burst Body Wash, Gentle Body Scrub, Luxurious Body Butter and Velvety Hand Cream containing macadamia nut and sweet almond oil. For more information, visit [sanctuary.com](http://sanctuary.com).

Worth  
£200



Worth  
£300

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For more information visit [virginexperiencedays.co.uk](http://virginexperiencedays.co.uk).

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Look like you've just stepped out of the salon with this all-in-one home nail spa set worth £37.50. It has everything you need to give yourself a professional manicure and pedicure in the comfort of your own home. The 12 accessories will help you buff, shape, file, smooth and polish your nails to perfection. It even includes a bubbling finger spa to soften your cuticles and nails, and a nail dryer. To find out more visit [sensiospa.com](http://sensiospa.com).

Worth  
£75



## HOW TO ENTER

- 1 Visit our special giveaways website at [winit.topsante.co.uk](http://winit.topsante.co.uk)
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- 3 Fill in your email address and click on 'Enter This Competition'. The closing date is January 6 2016.

## Top Santé team

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# ASK THE EXPERTS

If you have a health, fitness or beauty question for our experts, email [talkback@topsante.co.uk](mailto:talkback@topsante.co.uk) or tweet us @TopSanteUK



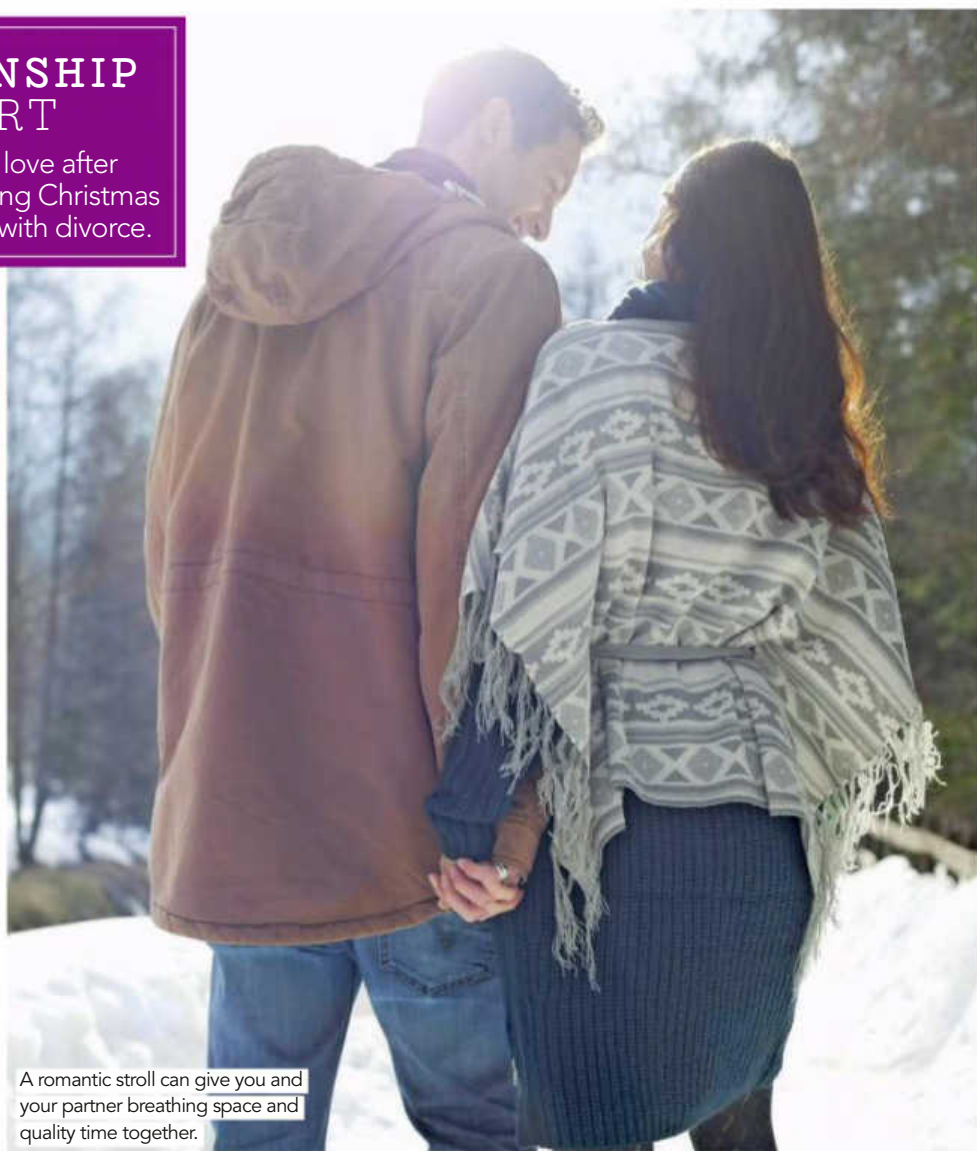
## RELATIONSHIP EXPERT

**Sara Davison** on love after bereavement, avoiding Christmas conflict and coping with divorce.

**Q** I know Christmas can be stressful for couples. How can I protect my marriage? *Sonia, 56*

**A** It's true that divorce rates are at their highest in January. The festive period can put a lot of pressure on couples and some struggle to cope. Many are not used to spending so much time together, as their normal routines, with jobs and juggling kids' hectic schedules, mean they are often apart for large chunks of the day and sometimes weeks. If your marriage is strong, this should not cause any major issues, even if tensions run high from time to time. But, if there are already cracks in the foundations, you have to handle things with care. The best thing to do is to manage the situation in advance and also have some tricks up your sleeve to cope if frustrations do escalate.

Good communication is key. If there are any issues that cause problems every Christmas, address them before they arise in a calm and non-confrontational manner. For example, I often hear from people who feel their partners don't do enough to help, which causes frustration and arguments. The cause is often not a malicious intent to upset but merely the fact that they see Christmas as a break from work and a chance to relax and put their feet up. But, left to fester, it can cause resentment and chip away at a relationship. Instead, agree who is



A romantic stroll can give you and your partner breathing space and quality time together.

doing what over the holidays so there are no unrealistic expectations. For example, if your husband never helps with the cooking, allocate him the role of building the 1,000-piece Lego set with the kids. That way, expectations are set and you all know what your responsibilities are.

Plan in some quality couple time, too. Christmas is often all about the

children, and this can leave partners feeling left out and rejected. If you sense tensions are rising, distraction techniques often work well – invite him to play a board game to change the focus, or send him out to walk the dog. Lean over and give him a kiss on the cheek – this will surprise him and usually does the trick to defuse the situation.



**Q** I've recently started dating again after I lost my husband of 25 years. On the past two dates I've come away feeling so guilty, as if I'm betraying my husband's memory. Is there anything I can do to help me get over this? *Karen, 60*

**A** Good for you for taking positive steps to move forward with your life. This isn't easy, and it shows strength to be dating even when you find it hard.

To help you get over the guilt, understand that what you are experiencing is normal and very common in your situation. This is because when someone you love has died, you still love them. This explains why you will have conflicting emotions when you decide to move on and find another relationship.

Be reassured by the fact that you are not looking to replace your husband. You will not forget him and a new relationship will not depreciate the connection

and love that you shared.

Some people find it easier to move on when they have created a way to remember all the good times that they shared. One effective way to do this is to create a memory box full of items and put it away somewhere, safe in the knowledge that those memories will live on. While you can revisit them at any time, you are also free to move forward with the next stage of your life, guilt free.



**Q** My friend is currently going through a very messy divorce and I've never seen her so down. Is there anything I can do to help? *Maggie, 51*

**A** Divorce often brings with it an emotional rollercoaster. It can be very overwhelming to come to terms with the breakdown of your relationship and also the ripple effect on your lifestyle, home, finances, friends and family.

There are several things you can do to help your friend. Firstly, be there to listen. She will need to lean on you as she comes to terms with what has happened. Getting her out of the house will help her to keep busy as will having planned events to go to.

Schedule in things that she enjoys doing. These can be as simple as having a cup of coffee at her favourite café or baking a cake together. It's important for her to have some fun to show her that she can be happy.

Get her moving, as physical exercise releases feel-good hormones. If she likes exercise, plan a trip to the gym together or a bike ride. Even a walk in the park will get her breathing more deeply and will be calming for her.

If you are still worried that she is not coping well, encourage her to seek professional help. She can ask her GP or a divorce coach for advice on how to move forward positively.





## NUTRITION EXPERT

**Henrietta Norton** on  
healthy fats and energising  
ways to start the day.

**Q** I try not to eat too much sugar as doing so makes me feel really tired and moody later on. How can I keep my glucose levels in check? *Annette, 45*

**A** Start the day with a good-quality protein breakfast. This will set you up for the rest of the day, regulating your appetite and reducing the temptation to eat sugar-laden foods. It will also support your body's production of useable energy, avoiding mid-afternoon slumps. The options I give my clients are poached eggs on steamed spinach, poached salmon and avocado on spelt or sourdough bread, or Greek yoghurt with home-made blackberry and spice compote.

Don't be tempted to skip meals in order to compensate for eating more at other meals. Instead, choose small, regular meals, eating every four hours. Always include a source of healthy fats, such as nuts, seeds, oily fish, olive oil/ flaxseed oil and avocados, and a source of lean protein, such as pulses, fish, nuts, seeds, turkey, chicken and game.

Taking chromium in supplement form can also support blood sugar ups and downs and reduce the urge to pick on sweet foods. Taking 150mcg per day has also been shown to normalise weight and reduce fat gain. Try Wild Nutrition's Food-Grown GTF Chromium, £17.50.

MORE INFORMATION: [HENRIETTANORTON.COM](http://HENRIETTANORTON.COM)



A small amount of healthy dietary fat is an essential part of your diet.

**Q** I recently learnt the difference between healthy and unhealthy fats. How can I cook party food using good fats? *Susan, 38*

**A** Natural, unprocessed saturated fats participate in many functions, such as the repair of gut cells and the formation of healthy brain and nerve cells, and play a central role in controlling inflammation, blood pressure and immune system activity. However, how you cook with them can determine how supportive they are for your health.

For medium-heat cooking, use short or medium chain natural saturated fats, such as ghee or coconut oil. These oils are more stable and don't have the health risks associated with partially hydrogenated, processed oils. It is best to keep high heat or

deep-frying to a minimum since essential fatty acids are destroyed with cooking.

When you cook with oils over higher heat, it is best to use high-oleic safflower oil, which will be more stable. Add healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats to your foods once they have been cooked, i.e. as a dressing for cooked veg or salads instead of butter. The best to use is cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil, or sesame, flax, walnut, almond, grapeseed and avocado oils. As much as it is healthy to include these fats in your diet, use them in small amounts – such as a tablespoon per meal.





**Q** Dark mornings deter me from running. How can I up my energy levels? *Toni, 43*

**A** The circadian rhythms that control your sleep and awake patterns are governed by light and dark, and that is partly why it can be harder to find the energy to exercise first thing in the morning. Some people find using a Lumie wake-up light, or similar, can help by reducing melatonin levels and raising cortisol, which makes us feel 'awake'.

Eating a small snack such as a handful of nuts and a few dried apricots or dates, or half a quarter of a mashed banana with avocado

on toasted rye bread 30-40 minutes before you exercise can provide an easy source of energy. Add spices such as cinnamon or fresh ginger into the mix to support digestion.



## FITNESS EXPERT

**PT Danny Fisher** tackles knee pain and long distance walking problems.

**Q** I do a yoga class and a nine-mile walk once a week. Would it better to split the walk up into shorter, more frequent sessions? *Sue, 45*

**A** I would suggest each week you do two one-hour sessions of hilly walks, pushing yourself to get out of breath, and use the spare time for extra dynamic stretches – stretching while you are moving – which are good for your body's range of movement and keep the calories burning too.

Add 3x 20 squats before, during or after your hill walks. Pushing through your heels when doing the squats will help activate your glutes more

and positively balance all the calf and quad work you do on the hills.

After your walk, try a one-minute plank to activate your core, which will help take some of that pressure from walking off your lower back.

Yoga or Pilates is an essential part of a weekly fitness routine. They help keep your body supple and strong and maintain the range of movement in your joints so keep doing your yoga class.

**Q** I run for 5k twice a week and often get a dull ache in my right knee. Is this a sign that I should stop, or should I just power on through? *Jane, 53*

**A** The general rule we work to in the industry is if something affects the way you move, stop. If it doesn't, you can progress but find ways to protect and steadily strengthen the area of concern. I would always recommend a good physiotherapy assessment. Most knee problems are related to a postural imbalance somewhere, for example a weak gluteus medius in the side of your buttock, or tight iliotibial band – the ligament that runs down the outside of the thigh from the hip to the shin. Imbalances can mean there is a muscle somewhere doing more work than it should due to either a weak or tight muscle somewhere else.

Most complaints from knees, hips, ankles, shoulders and backs can be improved dramatically or fixed with the help of a good physio-focused personal trainer. If the ache hasn't gone away after a few weeks, get it checked out by a qualified physiotherapist.





## THYROID EXPERT

Dr Izabella Wentz has advice on hypo- and hyperthyroidism.

**Q** Some days I have really bad 'brain fog'. My doctor says it's just the menopause, but I think there may be more to it than that. Could my thyroid be to blame? *Janette, 47*

**B**rain fog is a common symptom of thyroid disease and I would encourage you to get tested. Thyroid conditions may affect as many as one in five women, and the incidence of thyroid conditions increases with age, reaching a peak around menopause.

Talk to your doctor about having a thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) blood test, which is the screening test for thyroid dysfunction for healthy individuals that measures the level of free T3 and free T4 thyroid hormones circulating in your body. It's also important to be tested for thyroid antibodies – thyroid peroxidase and thyroglobulin. These are associated with the autoimmune disorder Hashimoto's thyroiditis. Ninety to 95 per cent of hypothyroidism cases, often called underactive thyroid, are caused by Hashimoto's, and the antibodies, produced when

cells attack your thyroid gland, can be seen for decades before an abnormal TSH reading is triggered.

Always ask for the actual figures of your test results – your level as well as the ranges. When scientists first set the 'normal' ranges of TSH, they inadvertently included people with compromised thyroid function in the calculations, resulting in an overly lax reference range. While most people with healthy thyroid function should have a TSH of 0.3-3.0 µIU/ml, some labs are using the old ranges of 0.2-8.0 µIU/ml. This can result in people with hypothyroidism being told that their thyroid tests are 'normal'. Additionally, the TSH test may miss many cases of thyroid dysfunction until the problem becomes advanced, but even slight alterations in thyroid hormones may cause symptoms such as brain fog.



**Q** I've been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and need to take medication. Are there usually any side effects?

*Tessa, 46*

**A** Luckily, thyroid medications have the same chemical structure as our naturally occurring thyroid hormones, and most side effects result from improper drug dosing, formulation or absorption. Thyroid hormones are dosed in micrograms, that is just 1/1000th of a milligram! When the dose is a teensy bit too high, we may have symptoms of hyperthyroidism, and when it's too low, we show signs of hypothyroidism! Testing your thyroid hormone levels every 6-8 weeks can help to ensure that your medications are optimised. Most patients feel best with a TSH under 2.

Levothyroxine, known as T4, is the most commonly prescribed thyroid hormone. This works very well for most people with hypothyroidism, but some may require the addition of liothyronine, a more active and rapid-acting thyroid hormone known as T3, to feel their best. To ensure proper absorption, take your medication on an empty stomach with a full glass of water and wait 30 minutes before additional food, drinks, supplements or medications.







## BEAUTY EXPERT

**Karen Sinclair Drake**  
advises on sensitive  
and ageing skin.

**Q** I have extremely sensitive skin but it's also quite dry so I need to moisturise it, particularly in winter. What can I use? *Nicki, 55*

**A** I actually consider it beneficial to have sensitive skin because it means you have to pay more attention to the ingredients in the products you are using. Many skincare products contain irritating chemicals such as foaming agents, so it is no wonder people react to them. The best solution is to switch to a more plant-based skincare system with a mildly acidic pH such as SophytoPRO, which is based on mild acidity and green technology, or SKN-RG, as this will help maintain the health of the acid mantle – outer layer – and avoid irritations. Always patch test new products (under the chin, at night) before introducing them to make sure they agree with your skin.



Cleansing, moisturising and using a serum are your best defence against fine lines and wrinkles.

**Q** I'm approaching 50 and think it's time to include anti-wrinkle products in my skincare regime. What sort of things should I be looking for? *Mary, 49*

**A**s time passes, the water and lipid content of our skin diminishes, which can lead to roughness, fine lines and wrinkles. Look for products that are devoid of toxic chemicals – as they can accelerate ageing. Cleansing with products such as SophytoPRO Pure Cleanser, £38, which uses vegetable emollients from high-quality cold-pressed organic seed oils, will help dissolve make-up and cellular debris and replace lost lipids. These moisturise and condition versus stripping your skin of natural oils.

Serums are a must because they have a greater penetration capacity and can provide amazing results in a shorter period of time. Choose antioxidant-based serums such as Shea Terra Organics' Rooibos & Vitamin E Anti-Oxidant

Facial Serum, £15, or The Spa Dr Antioxidant Serum, £45. These use ingredients from green or white tea, or red grape (resveratrol), which are clinically proven to help mop-up free radicals and protect against environmental aggressors such as UV radiation and pollution.

Moisturisers should include cell-communicating ingredients such as B3 and fatty acid-rich oils such as camelina, argan, sea buckthorn seed, rosehip and almond to help lock in water and smooth out fine lines and wrinkles. Try SKN-RG Organic Pro Oil Concentrate, £49.50, or Josie Maran 100% Pure Argan Oil, £39.50.



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, STOCKFOOD, CORBIS, SHUTTERSTOCK.

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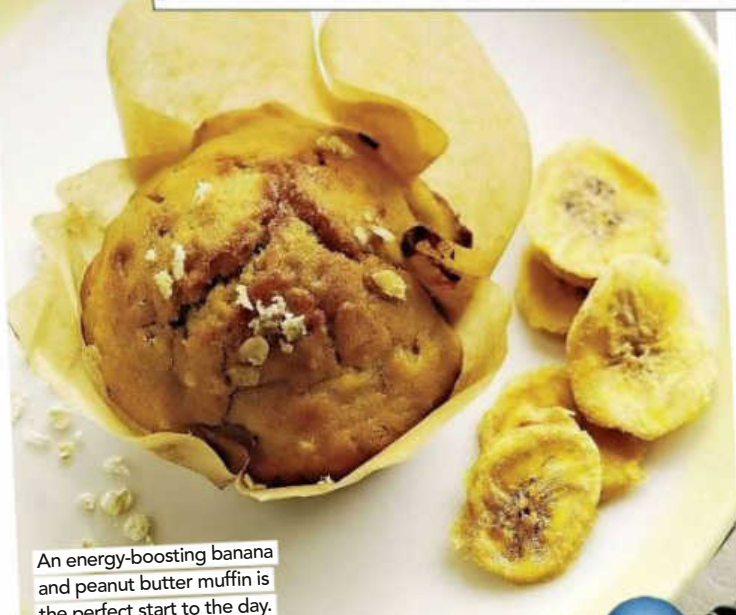
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# FOOD & DRINK

Eats, treats, recipes and gadgets for a healthy, wholesome January.



An energy-boosting banana and peanut butter muffin is the perfect start to the day.

## Shake up your wake up

If you're a fan of the 'most important meal of the day', Breakfast Week (24-30 Jan), is the perfect time to try a new recipe. Three in ten people who skip breakfast say they lack energy, and one in seven feel grumpy\*. So, set yourself up right with this muffin recipe. Bananas provide slow-release energy, the protein in peanut butter and eggs keeps you fuller for longer, and beta-glucan in oats helps to reduce

cholesterol. Preheat the oven to 200°C (gas 6), mix 3 mashed-up bananas with 100g crunchy peanut butter, 2 medium eggs, 125ml milk and 25g melted organic butter. Stir in 200g sifted self-raising flour (or a gluten-free variety) and 25g rough oats. Spoon into 12 muffin cases and bake for 20 mins.

● Visit [shakeupyourwake.com](http://shakeupyourwake.com) for Breakfast Week events such as cookery demos and tasting sessions.

## Portable hydration station

If you struggle to get through the recommended two litres of water a day, bobble INFUSE makes it easier and more enjoyable. Add your chosen fruit, vegetables or herbs to the bottle to infuse the water, and the filter cage will stop any bits flowing back through the nozzle when you drink. We recommend a slice of lemon for its immune-boosting vitamin C, and fresh peppermint to keep your digestive system running smoothly. £14.99, Harvey Nichols, from 1 December.



## GO NUTS FOR SNACKS

A recent study in the *European Journal Of Nutrition* showed that almonds are the ultimate snack for regulating appetite. Women surveyed either had a mid-morning snack of almonds, or nothing at all. Those who ate the nuts consumed fewer daily calories overall, even after lunch and

dinner, due to the filling fibrous content. Try Primal Pantry's new Almond and Cashew Paleo Diet Bar. 99p, Holland & Barratt.



## Pure blend of goodness

Home-made smoothies are an effective way to get multiple nutrients into your diet, but juicing removes all the pulp and seeds, which contain valuable fibre and nutrients. The *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* showed blackberries lost up to 80 per cent of their antioxidants when seeds were removed during juicing. To get the full-fruit goodness, try the Nutri Blitz, which whizzes up everything, from stems to peel. £79.99, [jmldirect.com](http://jmldirect.com).



## Viva la veg!

Did you know that 2 million tonnes of household food is discarded because it goes off? The GreenSaver Produce Keeper uses activated carbon filters to absorb the ripening agent ethylene, given off by food, while the inner basket controls airflow and humidity. From £14, John Lewis.



# EAT, JUICE

## - AND FEEL YOUR CLOTHES GET LOOSE!

Bring balance and a hearty dose of goodness to the way you eat both now and in future, with Jason Vale's latest 5:2 juicing plan.

**I**T DOESN'T MATTER whether you're a juice veteran or a juice virgin, anyone can reap the benefits of my 5:2 Juice Diet. Unlike a full-on juice regime, there is no reason for this to interfere with your normal life and, in reality, it can *become* your normal diet/life. The practicalities are ridiculously simple, but the effects it can have on your mental and physical health are extraordinary.

Calorie restriction, in one guise or another, has been shown to improve mood, control weight, improve heart function, help to control diabetes and improve memory. It also has a profound effect on longevity. Calorie restriction as a concept has been around in one guise or another for thousands of years. Hippocrates was into it, Plato 'fasted' for greater physical and mental efficiency, while many religions have some type of 'fasting' ritual as part of their faith – Lent, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, etc.

It's also a philosophy the Japanese live by, daily. Nor do I think it's coincidence that the Japanese happen to have the least amount of disease, the least amount of obesity and the longest lifespans of any other single nation on earth. They even have a phrase for it, 'Hara hachi bu', which roughly translated means 'Eat until you are eight parts (out of ten) full'. In the UK we are about as far away from calorie restriction as it can possibly get and there is no question, we are fatter and sicker because of it.

I have been doing some kind of calorie restriction juice programme for

the past 15 years now. When I started, I hated vegetables, and would never, ever eat them. I know my beige and white food diet caused my ill health – I had a painful and horrific looking skin disease, took an asthma pump up to 14 times a day, and took drugs for severe hayfever.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that 85 per cent of all disease is caused by what humans consume, whether that's food, drink, cigarettes or drugs, so it stands to common-sense reasoning that a good deal of disease can be helped by changing from a grey diet to one of colour and life. Now, I drink shed loads of different-coloured fruits and vegetables daily. I drink nothing but juice two days a week, but still have at least one vegetable-packed juice for three of the other five days and I eat clean [unprocessed foods] for three of the other five days. The 5:2 Juice Diet principles are: 1) You consume four 125/150-calorie juices a day for two days a week, 2) You eat 'clean' for three days a week, and 3) You have two 'Human Days', eating what you fancy.

The key is to commit to two full days of juicing every week. Even if you fall slightly by the wayside and your three 'clean eating' days turn into no clean eating days, you'll still be getting an enormous amount of nutrition on your two juice fast days. I don't want you to be *on* the 5:2 Juice Diet but rather for it to *become* your diet. I feel this lifestyle is achievable for most, and once you've done it for a while, you won't even think twice about it.

*Asparagus is a good source of B vits and magnesium*

### ASPARAGUS, PEAR AND AVOCADO BLEND

Rich, creamy, thick and incredibly filling – exactly what you want when doing the 5:2 Juice Diet.

- Apple 1
- Pears 2



## THAI SUPER SPICE JUICE

The creamy sweetness of freshly extracted pineapple juice is given a jolt with the inclusion of fiery hot chilli and ginger juice.

- Apple 1
- Pineapple ½, peeled
- Mango ½, ripe
- Lime 1, peeled, white pith left on
- Red chilli ½, seeds removed
- Raw ginger 3cm
- Ice 1 small handful

Juice the lot and pour over ice. Kick back, imagine yourself on a sun-kissed beach in Thailand and enjoy!

**Juicing tip:** If you're using a fast (centrifugal) juicer, tightly pack the mango and chilli in-between the harder produce to ensure maximum juice extraction. If you're using a slow (masticating/cold press) juicer, juice in any order you fancy as these machines are designed to handle soft fruits.



### Packed with vitamins

Nutritionally, chillis have high levels of potassium, magnesium and iron. Their high vitamin C content can also substantially increase the uptake of non-hermetic iron (found in plants) from other ingredients in a meal, such as beans and grains. They also help speed up metabolism.

### So what's in this baby?

That natural fat from the avocado helps to regulate your appetite and lifts the sweet flavours of freshly extracted apple and pear juice. The cucumber adds freshness to the whole blend while the asparagus gives something extra on the nutritional front. It's a good source of B vitamins, calcium, magnesium and zinc and a very good source of dietary fibre, protein, beta-carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin K, thiamine and riboflavin.

A typical serving of avocado (100g) is said to be moderate to rich in several B vitamins and vitamin K, with good content of vitamin C, vitamin E and potassium.

All in all, an extremely powerful blend that will nourish and help you detox.

- Cucumber ¼
- Asparagus 2 spears
- Avocado ¼, ripe
- Ice 1 small handful

- 1 Juice the cucumber, asparagus, pears and apple.
- 2 Scoop the flesh from the avocado into your blender. Add a little ice and whiz until creamy.
- 3 Pour into a glass of your fancy and slip slowly.



## WARM GINGER INFUSED BUTTERNUT SQUASH WITH PEAR, PARMESAN & TOASTED PINE NUTS

This truly gorgeous salad works equally well in winter as it does in summer. Light, sweet and packing a little heat, it genuinely has it all. Butternut squash, with its mild, nutty flavour, is super satiating and loaded with vitamin A, largely in the form of beta-carotene, fibre, potassium and magnesium. It may take a little longer to make than the other salads on the menu, but to coin a phrase from a very well-known Irish stout 'sometimes good things come to those who wait!'

Serves 2

- Small butternut squash ½
- Extra virgin olive oil 2 tbsp
- Himalayan rock salt ½ tsp
- Black pepper ½ tsp
- Raw ginger 4cm
- Ripe pear 1

- Parmesan 75g
- Mixed salad leaves 2 handfuls
- Pine nuts 1 handful
- Oranges 2
- Balsamic vinegar 4 tbsp

1 Prepare the reduction: juice the oranges directly into a small saucepan and add the vinegar. Gently simmer over a medium to low heat with the lid off for 30 mins until the mixture has reduced and slightly thickened.

2 Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/ Gas 4. Prepare the salad: remove the ends of the butternut squash and peel. Cut in half, remove the seeds, chop into bite-sized chunks and then scatter on a baking tray. Drizzle over half the oil and sprinkle over the salt and pepper. Peel then grate the ginger directly onto the butternut

squash and mix so that the squash is covered in oil and seasoning.

3 Place in the oven for 30-35 mins until the squash is cooked.

4 Cut the pear into quarters, remove the core and slice into thin strips. Shave the cheese with a vegetable peeler into thin slivers. Put the mixed leaves in a salad bowl and add the pear, remaining olive oil and lightly toss.

5 When the butternut squash is cooked, remove from the oven. Heat a dry frying pan on the hob and toast the pine nuts for 2-3 mins over a medium heat until golden, stirring continually to avoid burning!

6 Put the salad leaves and pear onto a plate, add the butternut squash, cheese and pine nuts. Finish with a generous drizzle of the balsamic reduction.





## GRILLED HALLOUMI AND VEGETABLE STACK, DRIZZLED WITH A LEMON PESTO DRESSING

I was a vegan for more than four years and the one thing I missed the most was cheese, none more so than warm halloumi. Not only does it add the edge on the flavour but is also an excellent source of protein and calcium. Juicy beef tomato and vibrant peppers sweeten this dish up a treat and ramp up those much-needed vitamins A and C.

Serves 2

- Medium courgette ½
- Red bell pepper 1 small
- Yellow bell pepper 1 small
- Beef tomato 1
- Sweet potato 1 small
- Halloumi 250g
- Olive oil 2 tbsp
- Fresh basil 1 handful
- Parmesan 35g
- Pine nuts 1 small handful
- Extra virgin olive oil 4 tbsp
- Lemon 1
- Himalayan rock salt ½ tsp

■ Black pepper ½ tsp

You will also need 4 wooden skewers

**1** Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4. Remove the ends from the courgette, peel and cut lengthways into 4 slices. Cut the bell peppers into quarters and remove the seeds and core. Take a thin slice from each end of the beef tomato and discard. Slice the remaining tomato into 4 slices. Peel the sweet potato and slice lengthways into 4 slices. Cut the halloumi into 8 slices. Drizzle ½ tbsp olive oil onto a baking tray (making sure the tray is covered). Place the sweet potato onto the tray, leaving a much room around each piece as possible, then drizzle ½ tbsp olive oil over the slices. Place in the oven for 10 mins.

**2** Meanwhile, take a skewer and add 1 piece of red pepper, 1 slice of halloumi, 1 slice of courgette, 1 piece of yellow pepper, 1 slice of halloumi and finish with 1 slice of tomato.

Repeat until you have made 4 stacks.

**3** Once cooked, remove the tray from the oven and turn the potatoes over. Place the skewered stacks on top of each potato to form a stack with the red pepper on the top. Drizzle each stack with the remaining olive oil, return to the oven and cook for 25 mins.

**4** Make the pesto. Remove the basil leaves from the stalks and discard the stalks. Roughly chop the cheese and put all the ingredients into a blender (cut the lemon in half and squeeze the juice directly into the container). Blitz for about 30 secs.

**5** Place 2 stacks on each plate and drizzle over the pesto dressing.

**Jason Vale's 5:2 Juice Diet (£12.99, Juice Master Publications) is on sale now.**



STORE  
CUPBOARD  
STAPLES

# Focus on TURMERIC

This anti-inflammatory spice is the perfect ingredient to enjoy in warming dishes this winter.

**T**URMERIC IS A WOODY, reddish root from the ginger family. We usually see it in its powdered form, which features heavily in South Asian and Middle Eastern cooking, and while it adds a warming taste and yellowy hue to dishes, turmeric packs a health-boosting punch too. As such, it's been used in Eastern medicine for thousands of years, and in recent times it has also featured in Western clinical trials.

One of the most exciting studies looked at the role of curcumin, an active component of turmeric, to see how it could treat depression\*. Curcumin has natural serotonin- and dopamine-enhancing properties, and when researchers gave 60 patients with major depressive disorder (MDD) 1g curcumin over six weeks, their symptoms improved.

Last year, a study looked at how turmeric could lessen the inflammatory condition ulcerative colitis\*. Compounds in curcumin were able to inhibit the body's inflammation-causing chemicals, called prostaglandins, to reduce the number of cells that became inflamed.

The spice is now also being used in dementia trials\*. Not only does it prevent the nerve cell inflammation in the brain that's implicated in Alzheimer's disease, but it's also said to reduce the plaque that builds up in the brains of dementia patients.



## THE SKIN-SOOTHER

In ancient Indian Siddha medicine, turmeric was used to treat a range of skin-based conditions, due to its antioxidant properties. Soothe stressed skin by mixing 1 tsp each of yellow turmeric powder, gram flour, oats, fresh lemon juice and 1 tbsp live natural yoghurt. Apply to your face for up to 15 mins until it's fully dried, then wash off with lukewarm water.

## HOW TO USE IT

Turmeric is a favourite with Anjula Devi, chef and Indian cooking school founder. She says: 'Freshly grated turmeric root works wonders for soothing your digestive system. It adds a warm, earthy flavour to this healthy stir-fry that serves four.'

Warm 1 tbsp coconut oil in a wok, add 1 tsp asafoetida, ½ tsp mustard seeds, 4 curry leaves,

½ tsp red chilli flakes, ½ tsp cumin, ¼ tsp nigella seeds and ½ tsp grated turmeric root, and sauté for 5 secs. Finely chop ½ in ginger and 1 garlic clove, add to the mix, then cook for 5 mins. Add 2 carrots, sliced into sticks, stir well and cook for 5 mins. Add 110g fine green beans and cook for 5 mins more.

Add a mix of red, yellow and green peppers cut into sticks, plus 1 tsp mango powder and cook for a final 2 mins.



## What to buy

- Tea & Coffee Ayurvedic Stimulating Tea is designed to support your immune system. It contains turmeric root, ginger root, cardamom, coriander, cloves and nutmeg. £2.92, tea-and-coffee.com.
- Rude Health Ginger & Turmeric Oaty combines filling Scottish oats with warming turmeric and ginger for a satisfying snack. £1.99, ocado.com.
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1. Johnston SL, Farrell SA. The detection and management of vaginal atrophy. SOGC Clinical Practice Guidelines. No. 145, May 2004. 2. Morad G, Paketi F, Matalba E, Moscaruso F, Magnani F, Morad G. Open, non-controlled clinical studies to assess the efficacy and safety of a medical device in form of gel topically and intravaginally used in postmenopausal women with genital atrophy. Arzneimittelforschung. 2006;56(5):230-8.

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FOOD TO SUIT YOU

# Comforting CLASSICS

Dishes such as cottage pie and crumble act like a cosy winter blanket. These healthy takes from dietician Sarah Schenker are not only good for the soul, they're kind on your waistline too.







**W**HEN IT'S raining outside, a salad isn't going to cut it. You want macaroni and cheese, or maybe a nourishing bowl of soup. As soon as temperatures drop, our appetite for high-calorie, high-carbohydrate foods such as meat pies, mashed potatoes or stodgy chocolate dishes increases. It's been suggested these winter cravings are a throwback to the days when people needed extra layers of body fat to survive winter. An alternative view is that once we become cold, our body longs for foods that will quickly warm us up. Feeling cold triggers a message to the body to heat up, and that translates into cravings for carbohydrates that provide an instant heat boost. Once you give in to cravings for sugary, starchy foods, blood sugar levels can spike and then fall, setting up a vicious cycle that sends your appetite out of control.

The shorter days and lack of sunlight can also make you crave comfort food. Some people suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) during the winter, which is associated with low

levels of the 'happy' hormone serotonin. Serotonin can be boosted by carbs, which helps to explain cravings. Even if you don't suffer from SAD, your eating habits can still be affected by shorter days and longer nights. When it gets dark early, we stay indoors more, so we tend to do less physical activity, and eat more. Studies indicate the average person gains at least 1-2 pounds during winter. If this weight isn't lost, then a year-on-year gain can become a problem.

But that doesn't mean you have to go without your favourites. The key to enjoying comfort food is to be conscious of what, when and why you eat. Be mindful of portion sizes and how often you eat your favourite dishes. Every so often, keep a food diary for a week to keep track of what you're eating and drinking. This will help stop you from falling into a trap of eating mindlessly and letting emotions control your eating habits.

Comfort food doesn't have to equate to highly processed, high-fat or high-sugar foods. These healthy takes on comforting classics won't cause a huge spike in blood sugar, but will still fill you up and satisfy your cravings.

## HEALTHY COMFORT FOOD SWAPS

### FRIES

Cut sweet potatoes into wedges, lightly toss in oil, season with pepper and paprika, and bake. Sweet potatoes are higher in fibre and have a lower glycaemic index than white potatoes, so they won't spike your blood sugar.

### HAMBURGERS

Substitute some of the meat for beans, oats and chopped mushrooms when making burgers or meatballs. Use 30g of minced beef per burger, and replace the rest with a mix of red beans, mushrooms, onions, oatmeal and tomato paste – you'll get the same meaty texture but with added fibre and nutrients.

### DESSERTS

Use cinnamon or vanilla instead of table sugar. Both amplify sweetness, so desserts might only need half as much as stated in the recipe. Start with a teaspoon and add more to taste.



### DIPS

Instead of creamy garlic dip, try 'garlic nutter'. Blend a couple of heads of roasted garlic with cashew nuts. Play around with flavours by adding ingredients such as mustard, tomato paste or lemon and basil.

### CHILLI CON CARNE

Substitute a quarter of the

meat in your chilli for a can of refried beans, which will not only boost the fibre content but will give a lovely gooey, comfort food texture.

### BUTTER ICING

Swap some of the butter in chocolate icing for an equal amount of avocado and you'll add vitamins, minerals

and healthy monounsaturated fats without losing any of the creamy texture.

### ICE CREAM

Peel and freeze two bananas, then cut them into small pieces and blend in a food processor with 2-3 tablespoons of unsweetened cocoa powder for a few minutes until smooth.





## POACHED CHICKEN AND JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE SOUP

Chicken soup is often nicknamed 'Jewish penicillin' as it has been served up by mums for generations at the first hint of a cold or runny nose. A few years ago, researchers actually found evidence that chicken soup could help reduce upper-respiratory inflammation, which leads to cold symptoms such as a stuffy head and incessant sneezing. This recipe adds Jerusalem artichokes for a delicious nutty taste. They also provide iron, potassium and vitamin B1, which support your muscles and nerves. Although they're sweet, their starchy fibre stops any spikes in blood sugar levels.

Serves 6  
Prep time: 25 mins  
Cooking time: 1 hr 50 mins  
Per portion: 155 kcal, 648 kJ, 3g fat, 1g sats, 1g monos, 1g polys, 0.3g salt

- **Chicken** 1.5kg
- **Carrots** 4, peeled and sliced
- **Celery** 4 sticks, sliced (reserve the leaves from the inside)

- **Jerusalem artichokes** 2, peeled and sliced
- **Thyme** handful, leaves chopped
- **Frozen or fresh peas** 100g
- **Leek** 1, washed and shredded
- **Flat-leaf parsley** 1 bunch, leaves chopped

**1** Place the chicken, carrots, celery, artichokes and thyme into a large pan and pour in 3 litres of water or enough to cover the chicken. Simmer on a medium heat for 1½ hours or until the chicken is cooked through.

**2** Remove the chicken from the pan and strain the broth through a sieve, reserving the vegetables for later. Put the broth back on a high heat and allow to reduce for 15 mins (about 2 litres should be left).

**3** Meanwhile, tear the cooked chicken into long chunks (discarding the bones and skin). Once the broth has reduced, add the vegetables back to the pan with the peas, leek and chicken. Simmer for a further 5 mins.

**4** Serve sprinkled with chopped parsley and celery leaves.

## COTTAGE PIE

This makes a perfect weekday supper on a cold winter's night. Combining lean minced beef with lentils and topping the pie with butter beans boosts the fibre content, giving you all the flavour of a familiar cottage pie while helping to reduce cholesterol.

Serves 4  
Prep time: 20 mins  
Cooking time: 50 mins  
Per portion: 479 kcal, 2004kJ, 25g fat, 12g sats, 8g monos, 2g polys, 1.5g salt

- **Olive oil** 2 tbsp
- **Minced beef** 250g
- **Cooked green lentils** 250g
- **Onion** 1 large, diced
- **Celery** 2 sticks, finely chopped
- **Carrots** 2, diced
- **Tomato purée** 2 tbsp
- **Chopped tomatoes** 400g tin
- **Worcestershire sauce** 1 tbsp
- **Bay leaf** 1
- **Thyme** 1 tsp leaves, chopped
- **Vegetable stock** 300ml

### FOR THE TOPPING

- **Celeriac** 500g, peeled and cubed
- **Butter beans** 400g tin, rinsed and drained
- **Crème fraîche** 100g
- **Butter** 1 tbsp
- **Leeks** 2, washed and sliced

**1** Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the minced beef and brown on all sides. Stir in the lentils and cook for another 1-2 mins. Add the onion, celery and carrots and allow to cook for about 10 mins, until softened.

**2** Stir in the tomato purée, chopped tomatoes, Worcestershire sauce, bay leaf, thyme leaves and stock. Bring to the boil. Cover and simmer for 30 mins, stirring occasionally.

**3** To make the topping, bring a large saucepan of water to the boil and cook the celeriac until soft, for about 8 mins. Drain well and tip into a large bowl. Add the butter beans and crème fraîche and mash until smooth.

**4** Heat the butter in a pan and gently sauté the leeks over a medium heat. Add them to the celeriac and bean mash and season. Pour the cooked mince mixture into a shallow ovenproof dish and top with mash. Bake in the oven for 20 mins, until the top is golden brown.



*The beans,  
lentils and  
celeriac add  
fibre to this  
winter warmer*



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## MAC 'N' CHEESE

A traditional macaroni cheese can be irresistible – it's easy to keep eating more and more of it! This version is packed full of fibre, so you will start to feel full after only a small plateful. The spinach adds an injection of vitamins and minerals, and the oatmeal adds a lovely crunchy texture and has cholesterol-lowering properties.

Serves 4-6

Prep time: 20 mins

Cooking time: 15 mins

Per portion: 542 kcal, 2267kJ, 28g fat, 14g sats, 8g monos, 2g polys, 1.3g salt

- Strong cheddar cheese 175g, grated
- Parmesan 50g, grated
- Fine oatmeal 50g
- Gruyère 50g, grated
- Wholegrain macaroni 280g
- Butter 75g
- Spinach 200g
- Nutmeg pinch
- Milk 700ml
- Plain flour 50g
- Dijon mustard 1 tsp
- Medium tomatoes 3, thickly sliced

**1** Preheat the oven to 190°C/gas 5 and lightly butter an ovenproof dish, about 30 x 20cm.

**2** Mix 25g of the cheddar and one-third of the Parmesan into the oatmeal. In a separate bowl mix together the rest of the cheese and set aside.

**3** Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil and cook the macaroni according to the packet instructions, usually 12-14 mins.

**4** Put 1 tbsp of the butter into a large, lidded saucepan and add the spinach leaves. Place the pan over a medium heat, cover and cook for about 2 mins. Drain the spinach in a colander and, when it's cool enough to handle, squeeze it in your hands to get rid of the excess liquid. Chop finely, place in a bowl and sprinkle on the nutmeg.

**5** Warm the milk in a saucepan. Melt the remaining butter in a large saucepan and stir in the flour. Cook for

about 30 secs, stirring, then take it off the heat. Pour the milk in slowly, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon, until you have a smooth sauce.

**6** When the macaroni is ready, drain well in a colander. Put the pan of sauce back on the heat and cook, stirring until thickened and smooth. Lower the heat and simmer for about 4 mins until glossy, stirring every now and then. Remove from the heat and stir in the combined cheeses and mustard. Taste and season with pepper. Gently mix the macaroni and spinach into the sauce and stir to coat completely.

**7** Tip the macaroni cheese into the buttered dish, scatter over the cheesy oatmeal and lay the sliced tomatoes over the top. Cook in the oven for 12-15 mins until beginning to bubble around the edges. Finish off under a hot grill for 3-5 mins to brown the crumb topping.

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## APPLE CRUMBLE

This pudding combines the sweetness of cooked fruit with the benefits of oats, which provide slow-release energy, and nuts, which provide protein, essential fats and immunity-boosting vitamins and minerals. We've chosen seasonal apples but any stoned fruit would work. You could also try fresh figs.

Serves 4

Prep time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 30 mins

Per portion: 441 kcal, 1845kJ, 13g fat, 2g sats, 6g monos, 3g polys, 0.3g salt

- Jumbo rolled oats 200g
- Pistachio nuts 75g
- Ground cinnamon 2 tsp
- Clear honey 2 tbsp
- Rapeseed oil 1 tbsp
- Apples 1kg, peeled, quartered and cored
- Coconut sugar 2 tbsp
- Star anise 2
- Lemon 1, zested and juiced
- Crème fraîche to serve

- 1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6. Combine the oats, pistachio nuts and cinnamon in a large bowl and add the honey and oil, stirring until well combined. Tip onto a non-stick baking sheet and spread out evenly. Bake in the oven for 15-20 mins, stirring halfway through cooking to prevent the edges burning. Remove from the oven when the mixture is crisp and golden brown and set aside to cool.
- 2 Place the apples in a large pan with the sugar, star anise and lemon zest and juice. Cook over a high heat for 3-4 mins until the sugar has dissolved, then reduce the heat, cover and simmer for a further 7 mins, or until the fruit has softened but still retains its shape. Remove the star anise.
- 3 Scatter the honey nut mixture on top of the cooked fruit. When ready to serve add a dollop of crème fraîche.



## BUTTER BEAN CHOCOLATE BROWNIES

**Butter beans might not be the first ingredient you think of using to make brownies, but they work well to give a dense, moist texture as well as supplying plenty of fibre and protein. Butter beans are a good source of the antioxidant manganese, which is needed by the body to help protect cells against damage.**

Makes 12

Prep time: 10 mins

Cook time: 20-25 mins

Per portion: 158 kcal, 661 kJ, 7g fat, 2g sats, 3g monos, 1g polys, 0.4g salt

- Apples 5, peeled, cored, chopped
- Butter beans 400g tin, rinsed and drained
- Rice flour or spelt flour 200g
- Baking powder 2 tsp
- Salt pinch
- Cocoa powder 3 tbsp
- Eggs 3
- Coconut sugar 50g
- Vanilla essence a few drops
- Pecan nuts 100g, roughly chopped

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas 4 and lightly grease a 26 x 18 cm baking tray.
- 2 Place the apples in a saucepan with

2 tbsp water, cook for 5 mins until they start to soften and then gently crush with a wooden spoon until they form a purée. Remove from the heat and allow to cool.

3 Place the beans and a splash of water in a food processor and whizz together until smooth – you are looking for the consistency of mashed potato. Add more water if the mixture looks too dry. Add the apple purée and process again for a minute or two, until smooth and well combined.

Sift the flour, baking powder, salt and cocoa powder into a large bowl. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs with an electric whisk, add the sugar in 3-4 batches, beating well after each addition. Add one-third of the bean mixture and one-third of the flour mixture to the egg mixture, and fold in gently. Repeat twice more until everything is incorporated.

4 Add the vanilla essence and pecan nuts and gently fold through. Pour the mixture into the baking tray and spread out evenly. Bake in the oven for 40-45 mins. Check the brownie is done by inserting a skewer into the middle – it should come out clean. Allow to cool before cutting into squares.



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# YOUR VIEWS

## New 'leash' of life

I have always tried to stay healthy by eating well and exercising. The biggest and recent improvement to my health and fitness has come thanks to our goldendoodle (a golden retriever and poodle cross), Barney, now two years old. He makes sure I get at least one-and-a-half hours' brisk exercise every day come rain or shine and always makes me and my husband, Dave, smile with his lovable character. Being outdoors more has also made me appreciate

the wonders of nature and the changing seasons, and we have developed a whole new social life with fellow dog walkers. Who needs a gym when you have a dog and the great outdoors to enjoy?

*Lesley Ward, Doncaster.*



Lesley, with her fitness partner, Barney.

**Congratulations Lesley, you've won a Maddi Alexander Serene Gift Box worth £117, which includes bath and body oil, soaking salts, travel candle, pillow spray, body butter and door hanger. We hope it helps you relax after your long walks!**



## ARE YOU AN OWL OR A LARK AND DO YOU FIND THAT IT AFFECTS YOUR EXERCISE ROUTINE?

● I'm definitely an owl. I exercise in the evening, as I'm terrible at getting motivated in the morning!  
**Rachael Saghri-Trigg**

● When I was working, I preferred to exercise first thing in the morning. Now I'm retired, I prefer to exercise mid afternoon.  
**Isobel Lyman**

● I'm an owl, as I'd rather exercise straight after work.  
**Elaine Wotton**

## Fighting fit at every age

After some time away from working out, I joined a gym again a year ago. I never thought that I would start pumping iron and taking classes at the age of 46, but I now do Body Combat, Body Pump and spinning classes as well as lifting weights, and I've never felt better. Far from being daunted by being in classes with women half my age, I'm relishing the challenge, and knowing that I can keep up with them gives me a real confidence boost. The amazing thing is, I'm never the oldest in the class. There are some women in fantastic shape still keeping up well into their 60s and even 70s. Now, that's something to aspire to.

*Ann Jackson, by email*

## A soothing read

I couldn't agree more with the quote that books are the quietest and most constant of friends, which I read in your 25 *Soul Soothers* article (November). My shelves are stacked with hundreds of books that have seen me through good and bad times. I find reading is the only thing that completely allows me to switch off from everyday worries as I become immersed in the lives of the characters. I often find strength from literary figures and think about what they would do when confronted with a problem. Reading gives me great joy and there's nothing I look forward to more than getting home after a hard day and curling up with a good book. It's perfection!

*Carol Hargreaves, Weymouth.*



## Life's little pleasures

**We asked you for your soul soothers...**

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*Isobel Lyman, Facebook.*

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## Kirsty Gallacher

The Sky Sports News presenter on turning 40, her *Strictly* experience and being her most body confident ever.

**My mum is a dietician so I was brought up with a balanced view of eating.** I was allowed to eat a bit of everything – nothing was cut out. Mum taught me ‘everything in moderation’ so I’ve always lived by that. As I stepped up my fitness over the past few years, I cut down on eating bread and wheat-based foods. Now I don’t eat them at all as they make me feel uncomfortable and sluggish. I also only have milk in tea and coffee. I like porridge, though, so I use almond milk for making that.

**I love champagne as a treat but I’m not a big alcohol drinker.** I enjoy a glass of red wine, but I never drink white. I don’t touch spirits other than the occasional really good gin and tonic.

**I was the sportiest child ever.** With Dad being a professional golfer, there was definitely an element of knowing that being fit and healthy was good for me. I was drawn to quite boyish activities, but I tried ballet and loved tap dancing. I was useless at gymnastics though.

I’ve become more flexible since *Strictly*, too. I loved the lifts and could get into quite dynamic positions.

**During my divorce last year, I threw myself into fitness to help me cope.**

Divorce is such a horrible, negative thing, so I wanted to do something that made me feel positive and energised. I have a personal trainer, Josh Salzmann, who I train with 2-3 times a week. We do weight training, resistance work, press-ups, tricep dips and pull-ups. It’s intense work but I’m seeing results. My body has completely changed and I now feel so strong, physically and emotionally.

**Strictly sculpted my body even more, particularly my stomach and arms.** I ate more during the series too because the training was so intense – five days a week with cardio, core work

for helping hold the positions and strength training for the lifts. I learned that if I wasn’t using every muscle for a dance, I was doing something wrong.

**I always try to eat meals with my two sons, Oscar and Jude.** Eating breakfast is really important, and the kids like porridge or eggs – they’re

growing boys and big eaters! I get fit just running around after them!

**I never skimp on my beauty regime.** Because my job entails wearing a lot of screen make-up every day, it’s vital that I cleanse my skin properly and exfoliate to get rid of it all. I drink a lot of water too. High-definition TV motivates me to take care of myself if nothing else!

**I’m 40 this month but I don’t see it as a milestone age.** Everybody else does, but I don’t think it should be such a big deal. Turning 40 used to be feared, but we’re all 10 years younger than we used to be. I’ve never been in better shape nor have I felt as confident about my body as I do now. I’m not saying I’m perfect, but I’m heading in the right direction for what I want. In 2016, I plan to increase my training even more and also add yoga and Pilates to my routine to create a better balance, as these are more calm and controlled.

Kirsty with her *Strictly Come Dancing* partner, Brendan Cole.



## KIRSTY'S TIPS FOR A HAPPY, HEALTHY LIFE

**1** Don't get hung up about ageing – you can't stop it. Instead, fend it off by doing things you know are good for you,

such as keeping fit and eating well.

**2** Enjoy the little things in life. A simple meal, for example, can be

delicious and healthy, and often quicker to create than a takeaway.

**3** Always remember, 'everything in moderation'.

WORDS: JO WILLACY  
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